

Vaiṣṇava Kanṭha-Hāra

The Guidebook for the Spiritually Inclined



His Divine Grace
Mahāmandaleshwar
Mahant Kṛṣṇa Balarām Swāmī
Founder-Achārya of Bhāgavat Dharma Samāj





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a Comprehensive Philosophical Treatise of the Vedic Philosophy.
Presented by His Divine Grace Mahāmaṇḍaleśhwar
Mahant Kṛṣṇa Balarām Svāmi.
<Swami> Kṛṣṇa Balaram.

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Cover Illustration: The Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared as Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabu about five hundred years ago in India, holding a spiritual necklace for the sincerely interested people to obtain liberation from the cycle of birth and death..

This book is dedicated to
Our Divine Spiritual Master
Om Vishnupād Paramahāṁsa 108

A. C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Śrīla Prabhupāda
Founder-Acharya: International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness
The Greatest Exponent of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness in the world
His sole mission was to present the exact
vedic knowledge without making any changes.
Readers will find
that unchanged version in this book.

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The Unbroken Chain Of Disciplic Succession

एवं परम्परा प्राप्तमिमं राजर्षयो विदुः ।
(Bhagavad Gītā 4.2)

The knowledge presented in this Vaiṣṇava Kaṇṭha Hāra book has been received through the following unbroken chain of disciplic succession from Lord Kṛṣṇa:

1.	Kṛṣṇa	20.	Mādhavendra Puri
2.	Brahmā	21.	Īśvara Puri (Nityānanda, Advaita)
3.	Nārada	22.	Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu
4.	Vyāsa	23.	Rūpa, (Svarūpa, Sanātana)
5.	Madhva	24.	Raghunātha, Śrī Jīva
6.	Padmanābha	25.	Kṛṣṇadāsa
7.	Nṛhari	26.	Narottamadāsa
8.	Mādhava	27.	Viśvanātha Chakravartī
9.	Akṣobhya	28.	Baladeva, Jagannāthadāsa
10.	Jayatīrtha	29.	Bhaktivinod
11.	Jñānasindhu	30.	Gaurakiśora
12.	Dayānidhi	31.	Bhaktisiddhānta Saraśvatī
13.	Vidyānidhi	32.	His Divine Grace
14.	Rājendra		Bhaktivedānta Svāmī
15.	Jayadharma		Prabhupāda
16.	Purusottama	33.	His Divine Grace Mahant
17.	Brahmaṇyatīrtha		Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarām Svāmī
18.	Vyāsatīrtha		Mahāraja
19.	Lakṣmīpati		

Sanskrit Pronunciation Guide

There are fifty-two alphabets in Sanskrit language among them forty-nine are most commonly used. The words and names in this literature are spelled according to an international system that scholars have accepted to indicate the pronunciation of each sound in the Sanskrit language.

The short vowel **a** is pronounced like in alpha, long **ā** like the **aa** in far. Short **i** is pronounced as in pin, long **ī** as in eel. Short **u** as in full, and long **ū** as in fool. The vowel **r** is pronounced like the **ri** in Sankrit. The vowel **e** is pronounced as in bet, **ai** as in aisle, **o** as in go, and **au** as in how. The vowel **m̐** is pure nasal and is pronounced like umber and **h̐** is a strong aspirate and is pronounced as ah or like aha.

The guttural consonants- **ka**, **kha**, **ga**, **gha**, and **ñā** are pronounced from the throat in much the same manner as in English. **Ka** is pronounced as karma, **kha** as in inkhorn or in Eckhart, **ga** as in gun, **gha** as in dig hard, and **ñā** as in sing.

The palatal consonants- **ca**, **cha**, **ja**, **jha** and **ñā** are pronounced from the palate with the middle of the tongue. **Ca** is pronounced as in church, **cha** as in staunch-heart, **ja** as in jump, **jha** as in hedgehog, and **ñā** as in canyon.

The cerebral consonants- **ṭa**, **ṭha**, **ḍa**, **ḍha**, and **ṇā** are pronounced with the tip of the tongue turned up and drawn back against the dome of the palate. **ṭa** is pronounced as in tub, **ṭha** as anthill, **ḍa** as in dove, **ḍha** as in redhead, and **ṇā** as in nun.

The dental consonants- **ta** is like Spanish **t**, **tha** is like in truth, **da** is like in then, **dha** is like in dharma, and **na** is like in nut. In these the forepart of the tongue touches against the teeth.

The labial consonants- **pa**, **pha**, **ba**, **bha**, and **ma** are pronounced with the lips. **Pa** is pronounced as in pun, **pha** as in shepherd, **ba** as in bird, **bha** as in abhor, and **ma** as in mother.

The semivowels-**ya**, **ra**, **la**, and **va** are pronounced as in yes, run, light, and won respectively. The sibilants-**śa** as in shut, **ṣa** as in bush and **sa** as in sun. The letter **ha** is pronounced as in her.

Swamiji's horoscope



संस्कृत विद्याधर्म विज्ञान संकाय

काशी हिन्दू विश्वविद्यालय

प्रोफेसर रामचन्द्र पाण्डेय

संकाय प्रमुख

एवं

अध्यक्ष, ज्योतिष विभाग



ज्यन्त श्री के साथ किष्ट वरमाला रहेगी।
जीवन के शिवद जैगें। विजयों के गायत्रम से गीत
विजयों की छट्टु रहेगी।

किसी उद्देश्य की इच्छा के लिए श्री
संरक्षा से सम्बद्ध रहेगे। कानक रिवाल संस्कार
की स्थापना करेगी।

The above Hindi passage is taken from Swamiji's horoscope booklet prepared by professor Ramachandra Pandeya (his letterhead is above the passage), a close friend of Swamiji's father. Years after preparing this horoscope, he became Dean of the faculty of astrological sciences at the University of Kashi Hindu Visvavidyalaya, Varanasi, India, and predicated the following about our Guru KrsnaBalaram Swami, who was a child at that time. He

wrote in Swamiji's horoscope predicting that "This child will take the Sanyasa order, will become a well-respected and honored saint, will carry the unbroken chain of disciplic succession of his Guru forward, and will make many disciples who will later make many disciples. Thus, the unbroken chain of spiritual disciplic succession will carry on further. Swamiji will either join a spiritual institution or establish his own spiritual institution to fulfill his mission." This is one of the physical proofs that Swamiji has fulfilled the earnest desire of his Guru who stated that if even one person becomes a pure devotee of the Lord, he will consider his attempt a success. All this has come true, as have many other predictions written in Swamiji's horoscope booklet. Now it depends on who are the fortunate souls that will participate in Swamiji's mission and will become connected to the Supreme God, Lord Sri Krsna, thus cutting the tie to the cycle of birth and death, and reach the spiritual world to enjoy with Him eternally.



My Mission

Originally when we joined our Guru's movement, the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement known as ISKCON, in Vrindāban, there were only three thatched huts to live in. ISKCON was not known to the public in India at that time. Śrīpāda Ānanda Mahārāja (Śrīla Prabhupāda's godbrother) was living in one of the huts and we lived with him in that same hut. We only knew the perfect way of spiritual life prior to joining ISKCON and also saw Ānanda Mahārāja practicing the same way. A few western devotees who were living in the huts were externally seen to be living properly. When Śrīla Prabhupāda came to Vrindāban, he stayed only a few days in a house away from the huts. We had only experienced good standards of spiritual life. If there were substandards in spiritual life we would have left the movement then and there. Everything was austere and felt okay in those days because we were mostly with Śrīpāda Ānanda Mahārāja seeing him practicing spiritual life wonderfully.

After the Vrindāban temple was inaugurated, Śrīpāda Ānanda Mahārāja was asked to leave the temple. I stayed and witnessed very diluted spiritual standards in ISKCON. Especially right after the departure of our Spiritual Master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, the quality of spiritual life deteriorated a lot, by seeing which we very much regretted participating in ISKCON. If I would have seen, or even felt about such low standard of spiritual life existed in ISKCON, I surely would not have joined the movement. We were born and brought up in a spiritual environment in a Vedic Brāhmaṇa Vaiṣṇava Āchārya family. We had Vedic training since birth, and that is why we knew the actual standard of spiritual life. With great regret, we still resolved to tolerate and remain in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement for our whole life. We knew that the rule

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and duty for a disciple is to follow and serve their Vedicly authentic Spiritual Master for their whole life. Thus we tolerated everything going on in ISKCON in the name of devotional service. Spiritual standards became so deteriorated in ISKCON that we felt like doing something and tried a great deal to correct it by talking to the leaders of the movement, but it was to no avail. Then we decided to write a book which presented the true standards and called it the *Vaiṣṇava Kanṭha-Hāra*. In early 1985 we showed the manuscripts to His Holiness Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswāmī, an American born ISKCON leader. He read the manuscripts and followed the Kārtika-vrata rules and advertised them to so many ISKCON devotees so they would be in Vrindāban for Kārtika austerities. We were happy with this, thinking some devotees have started to come to Vrindāban to perform austerities and to follow Vaiṣṇava rules from our book. We thought that our book would gradually convince all the devotees to be real devotees. But somehow, unknown to us, the editor made grievous mistakes and ruined our book. He might have been told to do this because the ISKCON leaders inside their heart did not want to follow real spiritual life. We paid for everything including the editing, typesetting by the Spanish BBT and, before we found out about the mistakes made in our book, the book was printed. Two thousand copies were printed. When we read the book and found unimaginable philosophical mistakes, we stopped its distribution and told our disciples to trash the books. Now we have corrected all the mistakes, and have presented it as it was supposed to be. We experienced a great financial loss and loss of time preparing this,

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but now this book is in your hands and has the right spiritual information.

Our humble mission is to present every spiritual detail correctly so people can follow the right spiritual path correctly and not waste their life following an incorrect version of spiritual life. As we had been saying all along, our Mission is that, no matter what happens to us, we will follow and present the undiluted spiritual life until we take our last breath. Our humble desire is to help the innocent so that they can receive merits from their spiritual practice.

A true devotee lives in this world just to help everyone spiritually. He acts as a messenger of God on earth and mercifully guides everyone to God. He tolerates the problems and difficulties that come while preaching the gospel of God on earth. He works tirelessly for the spiritual welfare of humanity. This was experienced by Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu while He was preaching. All the Spiritual Masters, including the Spiritual Masters from our unbroken chain of disciplic succession, had experienced the same problems. Even though troubles are faced, the true devotees do not give up their spiritual preaching. Sometimes in Kaliyuga, even disciples create troubles for their Guru, don't follow much of the Guru's teachings and even change the message presented in his books. They even do many non-scriptural things in the name of their Guru. We have personally seen this in the case of our Guru, how he experienced havoc from his disciples while he was alive. Once this even happened in Vrindāban. If this could happen in Vrindāban then surely this happened in other places too. Our Guru's Guru experienced such havoc with his

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leading disciples as well. Once our Guru's Guru cried with tears and said, "These disciples are treating me like a barber and a laundryman. But Guru should always be treated with great awe and reverence." When the Guru knows that disciples do not follow what he wants, he feels very sad. To make someone a devotee, his head has to be shaved, thus the Guru feels that he has become a barber. To make a disciple he spiritually initiates, giving the disciple a sacred thread, thus washing the disciple's soul. For this, the Guru feels like he has become a laundryman. Those who are genuine disciples they remain indebted to their Guru birth after birth for showing them the concrete path to liberation.

Our Spiritual Master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, left the association of his godbrothers and started his movement ISKCON, and we also left the association of our godbrothers and started our movement, Bhāgavat Dharma Samāj. But the difference between our godbrothers and our Guru's godbrothers is that the background of our Guru's godbrothers was Vedic and they had wholeheartedly had participated in spiritual life. That is why they did not criticize our Spiritual Master as badly as our godbrothers did and do. Our godbrothers and godsisters came from very bad backgrounds. That is why, even though we have left ISKCON and have nothing to do with them, still they speak unspeakable things against us, including making up lies about us. What benefit they obtain from doing this, only they only know. I know that they implicate themselves in offenses, especially the first offense against the holy name. They should humbly practice spiritual life, thinking they were raised eating cows, whom Lord Kṛṣṇa loves. As per the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, a dog eater becomes purified by

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truly taking to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but nowhere in any scriptures is it stated that a cow eater becomes purified. This is because Lord Kṛṣṇa worshiped cows. However, humbly practicing spiritual life will purify them because spiritual practice as fire to burn any sin, provided the attitude is correct while practicing spiritual life. If one can go back to Godhead by humbly practicing spiritual life, then why should one create havoc on their way to God by criticizing a devotee whose very blood spiritual life runs and who knows nothing outside of spiritual life? The scriptures state that a genuine devotee should not stay in a place where hypocrites dominate. That is why we followed the footsteps of our Guru, Śrīla Prabhupāda, left our Guru's movement. The *Nīti Śāstra* states:

*durjanasya ca sarpasya varam̄ sarpo na durjanah
sarpo daṁśati kālena durjanas tu pade-pade*

"One should rather live with a snake than live in a place where wicked people dominate because the snake will bite only once when the time of death arrives, but the wicked rascals will torment one at every step, which feels worse than death."

The wicked will never be straightened because not only they inherited bad karma from their previous life but they have no desire to rid themselves of their bad karma. It is in their nature to be wicked and therefore it is always best to leave their association. As Manu Mahārāja states, *durjano nārjavam̄ yāti sevyamāno'pi nityaśah*, "The wicked can never be corrected even if they are consoled regularly to turn into a good person." Therefore, leaving the association of fake devotees to seek the

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association of real devotees is justified. As it is address to the human being in the *Nīti Śāstra*:

*tyaja durjana saṁsarga kurū sādhu-samāgamam
bhaja lakṣmī-patiṁ viṣṇum bhukti-muktī pradāyakam*

"O human being, leave the company of wicked hypocrites and seek the association of real devotees to worship Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa peacefully. If you do so, you will be rewarded with all required things while alive and liberation after your death."

The association of real devotees is very rare in this world. But if somehow, due to some fortune, one obtains the association of a real devotee, then that association should be embraced wholeheartedly and held onto until the last breath because such association is not even obtained after millions of pious deeds from millions of previous births. Such saintly association is always beneficial. As it is stated in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, *sujanānāṁ hi saṁsargah nitarāṁ pariśobhanāḥ*, "The association of real devotees who are wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord always results in one's benefit. Therefore, one should seek out, find, and closely associate with a real devotee because it elevates one's consciousness in every way."

Our Spiritual Master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, had wanted everything spiritual to be presented As It Is, without making any changes. He presented this as proof by his adding "As It Is" to his *Bhagavad Gītā* title. Śrīla Prabhupāda dictated his books on a Dictaphone and made his books into tapes. He did not write hard copies of his books. But the leaders of ISKCON made changes in

his books that suited their will, printed his books, and then destroyed his dictated tapes. The discrepancies found in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books can no longer be compared with his dictated tapes. Śrīla Prabhupāda was very elderly and was kept very busy, thus he could not find time to read his books thoroughly. One can imagine what was done to the books of Śrīla Prabhupāda if two of our books could be destroyed when we wrote our books on hard paper. We are not elderly and are still alive and they manipulated our properly presented philosophy, so what would they not have done to our Guru's works? We read our books, the Vaiṣṇava Kanṭha-Hāra and the Bhagavad Gītā, and found and detected the problems in order to reprint them.

The scriptures describe that there would be two categories of disciples in Kaliyuga. One category of disciple genuinely feels happy seeing their Guru physically present and thus tries to serve the Guru wholeheartedly in every possible way to keep him happy. But the other category of disciple does not care about the Guru's physical presence and sometimes even feels annoyed or bothered by the Guru's presence. Instead such types of disciples feel happier worshiping the Guru's photo or his deity form. Out of these two categories of disciples, the first category of disciple is correct and considered to be of superior quality. The scriptures state that if a disciple sees their Guru with repugnance, feels disgusted by the Guru's presence, or feels upset by the Guru's strict dealings, then their spiritual advancement becomes jeopardized. As it is stated in the Nīti Śāstra:

īrśyā ghṛṇā tv asantuṣṭah krodhano nitya-samkītah

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para-bhagyopajīvī ca ṣaḍete duḥkha-bhāginaḥ

"For those who are always envious, those who have hatred or repugnance towards superiors, those who always remain displeased, those who remain always angry, those who always doubt others, and those who depend on others, the destination of these six categories of people is miserable."

Our Guru, Śrīla Prabhupāda, had experienced such unwanted dealings on several occasions. Once witnessed this with our own eyes. We saw how Śrīla Prabhupāda cried with tears and stood up, taking his bead-bag, and became ready to leave the movement. It was our fortune that Śrīla Prabhupāda changed his mind and decided to stay. It does not matter what the reason might be, real disciples should never treat their Guru obnoxiously. Making the Guru cry or become fed-up proves that the disciples are demoniac. Creating any kind of trouble for the Guru is not Vedic. A disciple should always be humble, tolerate the dealings of the Guru, and wholeheartedly serve him favorably in every circumstance. Keeping the unmotivated Guru always happy and satisfied is the criterion for spiritual success.

This book has nine chapters and includes all the required details of devotional service for liberation. It also includes detailed instructions about how to follow the spiritual path. How to distinguish a sage from a swindler and how to determine how much one has advanced on the spiritual path is also included. By following the guidelines of this book one will genuinely have Vaiśnava feelings and will genuinely develop the proper attitude and become qualified to claim to be a real Vaiśnava. If all the

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rules are followed properly, one can peacefully leave their body and will have no fear of facing Yamarāja after death. Following the rules of this book will surely invite the messengers from the Supreme Lord to take their soul to the spiritual world. In this there is no doubt. For this reason we have named this book *Vaiṣṇava Kaṇṭha-Hāra*, The Handbook for the Spiritually Inclined. It is certainly a necklace for a devotee because it gives details of how to and what to follow and what not to follow to attain self-realization. Please read systematically chapter-by-chapter, and your satisfaction is guaranteed. Jai Śrī Rādhé.

Dāsānudāsa,
Kṛṣṇa Balarām Swāmī
Ekādaśī day,
November, 30, 2017
Baltimore, Maryland
USA

INTRODUCTION

INVOCATION

We humbly invoke the blessings of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the *summum bonum*, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and of our divine and pure Spiritual Master, Oṁ Viṣṇupāda Paramahārīsa Parivrājakaśāra Aṣṭottaraśāṭa Śrī Śrīmad His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Śrīla Prabhupāda to complete this book, which includes the scope and nature of regulative details of devotional life in one single text. *Guru-kṛṣṇa prasāde pāya bhakti-latā-bīja*.

Vaiṣṇavism is the topmost spiritual activity. Human beings are awarded with special intelligence by the higher authority so they can adopt spiritual life. This means human life is meant to practice spiritual life and by the help of spiritual practice one can reach the spiritual world. Stopping the repetition of birth and death is the criterion of human intelligence. Reaching the spiritual world rewards the soul permanent enjoyment where one can sport there with God. Adopting spiritual life is called Vaiṣṇavism in the Sanskrit language and Vaiṣṇavism is the culmination of every category of spiritual life. Anyone who practices spiritual life, whether a male or a female, is addressed as a Vaiṣṇava in Sanskrit. Lord Kṛṣṇa can only be understood through execution of devotional service, as He stated in the Bhagavad Gītā, *bhaktyā tv ananyayā Śakya*. The reason for Vaiṣṇavism being the essence of all spiritual life is revealed by the ancient scriptures of India, which are impregnated with practical transcendental philosophy, its etiquettes, and divine blessings that culminate in Vaiṣṇavism.

Over five thousand years ago the Supreme Lord Himself appeared in India taking a form of the author named Śrīla Vyāsadeva. He wrote spiritual books and is accepted as the literary incarnation of God (*vyāsāya viṣṇu rūpāya*). The books

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Śrīla Vyāsadeva wrote were originally exhaled by the Supreme Lord just before creating this universe. That is why all the Vedic scriptures are called *apauruṣeya* (written by the Supreme). The Vedic scriptures that are available in Sanskrit today were written by Śrīla Vyāsadeva over five thousand years ago in India. There are innumerable Vedic scriptures, among which Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam is called the cream of all the Vedas. In these books, Śrīla Vyāsadeva himself philosophically proved that Vaiṣṇavism is the culmination of all spiritual paths. He also said that it is the only way to mitigate all problems of life in our present tumultuous times.

Supporting the conclusive writings of Śrīla Vyāsadeva, greatly honored *āchāryas* (spiritual teachers), such as Śrīpāda Rāmānujāchārya (1017-1137), Śrīpāda Nimbārkāchārya (1130-1200), Śrīpāda Madhvāchārya (1197-1276), and Śrīpāda Viṣṇuswāmī (1209-1296), have written extensively that *bhaktiyoga* (the path of devotional service also called Vaiṣṇavism) is the topmost yoga for a human being to adopt. The Supreme Lord Himself appeared again over five hundred years ago in India in His devotee incarnation as Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. He taught this process of devotional service by following it Himself and also preached about this process to everyone at that time. To whomever He met, He vividly explained that a Vaiṣṇava is the topmost spiritual title that could be awarded to a human being who is following the path of yoga. He also said that a Vaiṣṇava is the only person who is qualified to go back to Godhead in this lifetime. Śrīla Śrīdhara Swāmī stated, *param puruṣaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ bhaktiā utpadyate na anyathā*, "The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, can only be conquered by following *bhaktiyoga* (the path of devotional service), not by following any of the other spiritual processes which are prevalent nowadays."

A true Vaiṣṇava studies the Vedic literatures and always acts as per the rules mentioned in them so as to become a pure

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devotee. Śrīla Bhaktisidhānta Sarasvatī Goswāmi Ṭhākura Prabhupāda used to say that a devotee should act so perfectly that the Supreme Lord Himself would want to come down from His spiritual abode to see that devotee. Therefore a devotee should intensely endeavor to follow the prescribed Vedic standards to develop pure Vaiṣṇava qualities.

If a devotee sincerely performs *sādhana-bhakti* (regular performance of prescribed devotional service) as per the Vedic rules, then that devotee gradually achieves the stage of perfection. The Vedas do not just contain instructions for *karma-kāṇḍis* alone, as some less intelligent people profess, but the Vedas also mention guidelines for the spiritual advancement of serious students following the devotional path. The serious devotees search out the Vaiṣṇava section from the Vedas and follow them as a way of life. As per the devotee's sincerity in following the devotional path, Lord Kṛṣṇa helps them understand which rules to follow and which rules to avoid. A Vaiṣṇava accepts the instructions stated in the Vedic scriptures along with what is stated in the commentaries given by the Vaiṣṇava āchāryas (teachers) to determine how closely one is following the true devotional path. The spiritual teachers in the Brahmā-Madhva-Gauḍiya-Sampradāya (the tradition which we are following) accept all good teachings, even including certain portions from the teachings of Saṅkarāchārya's (788-820) philosophy, just to prove the authenticity and purity of Vaiṣṇavism.

Śrīla Vyāsadeva wrote the Vedānta Sūtra to lead people to follow Lord Kṛṣṇa. Since he wrote Vedānta Sūtra in aphorisms, many people could not understand the instructions mentioned in the Vedānta Sūtra. Thus, Śrīla Vyāsadeva himself wrote the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam as his commentary on the Vedānta Sūtra (It is now available in English) clearing his motive behind the Vedānta Sūtra. As a person holding a million dollars in their hands cannot use it effectively if the person has not been

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educated as to its value, similarly, all knowledge necessary for self-realization is in the Vedic scriptures—one just has to learn it. If one is not educated as to the real value of that knowledge, that person will not be able to fully use it to enhance their Kṛṣṇa consciousness properly. Anyone can become a devotee provided one follows the spiritual rules sincerely. But to be a first-class pure devotee, one must know the complete detailed science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness properly.

One should study Vaiṣṇava scriptures to increase one's understanding about spiritual life and Vaiṣṇava Kanātha-Hāra is such a book. We have included the required spiritual rules and if followed correctly one can easily march towards the spiritual world. Someone learned in Vedic philosophy can understand the detailed Vaiṣṇava rules included in this book. Hence, a spiritual seeker would be happy to find the essence of Vedic knowledge included in this single text.

A state authority may write an immutable law book to guide the citizens, and although those laws remain unchanged, other law books are written from time to time to further explain the original laws. Such acts of writing law books does not minimize the validity of the original law book, but enhances and simplifies it so the citizens can more easily follow them. When a shiny valuable diamond is set in a golden ring, the ring does not minimize the value of the diamond, but greatly increases it. Therefore, *we have presented this book not to challenge anyone, but to support and increase the value of our previous spiritual authorities.*

The Absolute Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is unlimited. Hence, everything regarding Him is also unlimited. For example, all scriptural instructions, whether spoken by Him or written about Him, are all unlimited. These instructions are revealed by the great *āchāryas* and the Spiritual Masters to their disciples in the unbroken chain of disciplic succession. A genuine disciple carefully follows the instructions given by their genuine

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Spiritual Master and always follows them as their life and soul and glorifies him everywhere and makes him world-famous as the greatest spiritual authority.

A disciple must be very cautious to not misuse the Spiritual Master's name to fulfill personal whims nor should the disciple carelessly inform others about the knowledge received from the Spiritual Master. Lacking the proper time and a receptive audience, a Spiritual Master may not introduce his disciples to *all details* of scriptural knowledge. But the disciple should neither think nor imply that their Spiritual Master, although full in knowledge, was opposed to his disciples' learning and following those details. If the disciple does this, people may wrongly assume that their Spiritual Master does not know proper Vaiṣṇava rules and etiquette. Therefore, a devotee must be well-versed in the Vedic standards and follow them carefully, so as to not defame their own pure Spiritual Master. *Phalena pariciyate*. By seeing the etiquette and qualities of the disciple, one can easily understand the depth of knowledge and qualities of their Spiritual Master.

A sincere devotee naturally desires to purely follow the path of devotional service without deviation. If one somehow does not have a full understanding of the rules and regulations of Vaiṣṇava etiquette, that devotee may inadvertently deviate from the devotional path while thinking that they are actually following it. Therefore, greatly learned sages have compared the path of devotional service to a *kṣurasya dhārā* (a razor's edge) because by even momentary inattentiveness, one can be badly hurt by the edge of a razor blade. Similarly, if a devotee does not understand the details of the Vedic injunctions regarding devotional service, they may remain on the mental platform and eventually deviate from the actual spiritual path, and thus jeopardize their spiritual advancement.

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Revelation of Vaiṣṇava standards can only be done by the qualified Spiritual Master. Such a qualified Spiritual Master may reveal only limited information about Vaiṣṇava etiquette to his premature disciples but this does not mean that the Spiritual Master's knowledge is limited, it is the disciple who is not yet fit to learn them. A father may teach his young son certain knowledge in his childhood, and as his son grows up, the father teaches him more according to his son's ability to grasp and understand. Similarly, when the Spiritual Master sees that his disciples are following his instructions properly and advancing nicely on the spiritual path, he reveals higher instructions so they can advance further. Not all devotees are on the same level because the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states that there are three different classes of devotees—*kanīṣtha-adhikārī*, *madhyama-adhikārī*, and *uttama-adhikārī*. A devotee's advancement can be understood by how attached the devotee is to following the details of devotional service. The devotees whose misgivings are thoroughly cleansed by the process of devotional service are always joyful, being situated in elevated consciousness, and are very much attached to studying the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam in the association of true devotees.

On the devotional path, there are many major and minor rules. If one tries to follow the major rules but minimizes the importance of the minor ones, their spiritual advancement becomes doubtful. All rules of spirituality are important. A minor rule is considered minor (not unimportant) because it assists the devotee in better following the major rules. The Spiritual Master may emphasize the major rules of regularly chanting one's promised quota of *japa* (chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra rounds on beads) and avoiding the four vices of sinful life. For example, a Spiritual Master says that if one just chants sixteen

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rounds of *japa* every day and follows the four regulative principles—no illicit sex, no intoxication, no meat-eating, and no gambling—throughout his life, he will go back to Godhead. Whatever a pure Guru says is undoubtedly true. But without a proper philosophical understanding, one will in due course become frustrated and lose the taste for chanting and become deviant. Regularly chanting and following the Vedic injunctions can help one understand the value of remaining attracted to the regulative principles. By following the Vedic injunctions without deviation, one will have a better chance of remembering Lord Kṛṣṇa twenty-four hours a day. Without doing so, it would become difficult to follow even the most basic rules, and thus one would eventually relinquish the devotional path and fall back into bad habits.

Therefore minor rules are as important as the major rules, just as the doctor's prescription is as important as the medicine. Without the minor rules, the major rules will not help at all, or they help only to an insignificant degree. Haridāsa Ṭhākura is an example of a devotee who actually followed all the minor rules, as well as the major rules, and chanting his prescribed rounds of *japa*. Therefore it is important for a devotee to consider all the spiritual rules to be important regardless of their status of being minor or major rules.

In a society of Vaiṣṇavas, the major rules are never changed at any time. Once a devotee starts following a major rule, that devotee should never stop it. Minor rules, however, are increased with the spiritual maturity of the devotee. The more a devotee advances on the spiritual path, the more following minor rules are warranted, because they better prove the devotee's spiritual advancement.

The true Vaiṣṇava *āchāryas* never propagate anything contrary to the strict devotional path, but according to time, place, and circumstances they reveal certain rules and standards of spirituality. In the beginning a Spiritual Master might not ask

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the disciples to follow all the major and minor rules because he knows that they might not be able to follow or may even become discouraged, so he only gives them certain instructions. But this does not mean that he is opposed to or indifferent to his disciples' following the detailed rules on a later date. He reveals them gradually when he sees his disciples are advancing, and as per their spiritual maturity, he reveals them.

For a child, ignorance is bliss, but when the same child becomes an adult then he must familiarize himself with required knowledge. Similarly, a sincere student must become well-versed in Vaiṣṇava philosophy and its etiquette as per their spiritual advancement. He should not think that by ignoring the spiritual standards, he is excused from following them.

Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu instructed Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī to write books on the principles of devotional service. Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu also hinted to him as to what the books must include, but He Himself never wrote books. Lord Chaitanya instructed Sanātana Goswāmī to write down the symptoms of a true Guru and the symptoms of a true disciple. Following this instruction, the six Goswāmīs wrote many books and commentaries on the established Vaiṣṇava scriptures. They did not try to minimize or belittle their predecessors' philosophy in any manner. We are following in the line of the six Goswāmīs.

Vaiṣṇavas always feel very humble inside their heart. That is why Sanātana Goswāmī humbly responded with folded hands to Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu saying, "My dear Lord, You have asked me to write books explaining the regulative principles of devotional service, but I have no knowledge on spiritualism and therefore I do not know how such an important task could be completed by me." Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu was Sanātana Goswāmī's Guru, and a disciple must follow the orders of his Guru, therefore following the orders, Sanātana Goswāmī humbly wrote books.

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The disciple's duty is to always glorify their Spiritual Master. Their duty is to speak boldly about the greatness of their Guru and thus introduce him to others. For example, Śrī Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa brought glorification to his Spiritual Master, Śrīla Visvanātha Chakravartī Thākura, by defeating a great scholar on behalf of his Spiritual Master. To bring more fame to his Guru Śrī Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa wrote the *Govinda-bhāṣya* commentary on the Vedānta Sūtra. Even though his Spiritual Master, Visvanātha Chakravartī, never directly ordered Śrī Baladeva to write the commentary, still he did it because Śrī Baladeva knew that his Spiritual Master would have wanted him to do it. Similarly, our Spiritual Master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, was ordered by his Spiritual Master to preach in English but was not specifically ordered to write books, but he did so to glorify his Spiritual Master. He dictated his books into dicta-phones but unbeknownst to him, the dictated tapes were misconstrued by his western disciples and the books were printed with lots of misinformation. His dictated tapes were destroyed as well. His western disciples manipulated his writings to fulfill their hidden agenda. They made sure that what is present in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books should not be matched with his dictated tapes, which is why they destroyed the tapes. The spiritual law is that a disciple should not endeavor to misrepresent, create problems for, or distort any of their Guru's writings. But this all happened. Therefore, writings contrary to Vedic scriptures are seen in our Spiritual Master's books. They are not his writings. One should be very careful about our Guru's books because now they mostly fulfill the motives of his western disciples, who wanted to be worshiped by everyone. His western disciples had wanted everyone to think that this is what Śrīla Prabhupāda had

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wanted and that is why he wrote like this. But for those who know the scriptures properly, it is impossible to accept that, being an Indian Swami, Śrīla Prabhupāda would want to write things that are contrary to Vedic scriptures. Śrīla Prabhupāda always wanted everything spiritual to be As It Is, i.e., an unchanged version of Vedic civilization. Western people who are now newcomers to learning this philosophy do not know what is best and thus they accept the manipulated books as the writings of Śrīla Prabhupāda. This is going on in the name of Śrīla Prabhupāda. This is due to the influence of Kaliyuga. Whether one is initiated by a guru who is not authorized by ancient scriptures or initiated by those who claim to be initiating on behalf of Śrīla Prabhupāda, both parties are wrong. The reason of this is that one is flat-out inauthentic and the other is following Māyāvādī philosophy because initiating on behalf of a departed Guru does not happen in Vaiṣṇavism. In other words, both parties are rotten apples, by eating which spiritual death occurs, but the latter also has worms in it. The latter is worse because if a disciple goes wrong, the departed Guru cannot come down to correct the disciple. The only cure to this rotten-apple disease is to take initiation from a scripturally authorized Guru. Those who are spiritually fortunate are guided by their Supersoul (the omniscient higher authority) to the right path.

Studying the writings of the previous *āchāryas* is required. Those devotees who desire to become scholarly and also have time to study the commentaries and the writings of the previous Vaisnava *āchāryas* (spiritual teachers) should do so because every Guru wants his disciples to be scholarly and learned in Vedic philosophy. That is why he encourages some of his disciples to save some time from their daily works and study

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spiritual books. But while doing this, a disciple should not deviate from the daily prescribed devotional services. Vaiṣṇava āchāryas wrote on Vaiṣṇava philosophy, stating that the Lord is the Master and that all the living entities are His eternal servants. The six Goswāmīs of Vrindāban also wrote books in this pattern by further explaining devotional service. Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī wrote many books on devotional service, such as Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛtam (which includes the subject matter of devotees, devotional service, and Lord Kṛṣṇa), and also wrote Daśama-tiṣṭiṇī (a vivid commentary on the Tenth Canto of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam). He also wrote a commentary named the Dig-darśinī-tūkā on a famous book named Hari-bhaktivilāsa compiled by Śrīla Gopālabhaṭṭa Goswāmī. This book describes the rules and regulations of how to become a good Vaiṣṇava and the rules of how to be perfect householders and other divisions of Vaiṣṇavism, such as Brahmachārīs, Vānaprasthīs, and Sanyāsīs.

If a student is serious about advancing on the spiritual path and is determined to go back to Godhead, that student will learn and use all the acquired knowledge in performing devotional service. A genuine Spiritual Master always wants his disciples to go back to Godhead, and this is included in his daily prayer to the Lord. One cannot become a Spiritual Master and initiate disciples unless he is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures. He must be a pure devotee and well-versed in the revealed scriptures. He must be able to remove the spiritual doubts of his candidate disciples by properly presenting Vedic philosophy. If a Spiritual Master is not authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures then he takes his disciples to hell along with himself. Therefore, any disciple who takes spiritual initiation from a Spiritual Master who is not authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures becomes a disturbance on the spiritual path. As Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī states:

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*śruti-smṛti-purānādi pañcarātra-vidhīm vinā
aikāntikī harer bhaktir utpātāyaiva kalpate*

"Any spiritual activity that may be called devotional service which ignores the rules and regulations of the authorized Vedic scriptures such as the Vedas, Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas, Nārada Pañcharātra and other scriptures, simply creates an unnecessary disturbance on the spiritual path because of its being influenced by atheism." (Bhaktirasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.101)

The great *āchāryas* in our disciplic succession have stated that the position of a devotee is not ordinary because they follow all the rules of performing favorable devotional service. Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī compiled and wrote the Bhaktirasāmṛta-sindhu from various Purāṇas to prove that the path of devotional service is the topmost. He also gave his commentary on Hari-bhakti-vilāsa and stated it is a very important book for the devotees. Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Goswāmī wrote Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, quoting numerous Vedic scriptures to prove that Lord Chaitanya's philosophy is the topmost within Vaiṣṇavism.

Śrīla Vyāsadeva wrote scriptures to teach everyone about the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. All the bona-fide *āchāryas* based their teachings on their predecessor *āchāryas*. They did all this to help everyone to realize Lord Kṛṣṇa as the ultimate God, the *summum bonum*.

The Bhagavad Gītā states that the whole of human society has been divided into four social orders based upon their ordained inherent nature and their inclination to do certain kinds of work. The four spiritual orders were created according to one's status of mentality, their acquired knowledge, and purity. The social orders are called the four *Varnas*, which include Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras; and the Brāhmaṇas function as the spiritual teachers of these social orders. There are four *āśramas* (spiritual orders), namely the Brahmachāris,

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Grhasthīs, Vānaprasthīs, and Sanyāsīs. The Sanyāsī functions as the spiritual teacher of all the spiritual orders. According to scriptures, the Spiritual Master must be a pure devotee and should be well-versed in the Vedic scriptures so as to lead everyone to Lord Kṛṣṇa. One cannot be a bona-fide Spiritual Master if he does not know Lord Kṛṣṇa in truth. Whatever position one may have in the social or in the spiritual orders, one should not accept spiritual initiation from a Spiritual Master who is not authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures. A Spiritual Master must be a pure devotee and fully conversant with the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He must be a Vaiṣṇava and must know Lord Kṛṣṇa in truth. If such a Spiritual Master is found then he is bona-fide and qualified to spiritually initiate disciples on behalf of the Supreme Lord. Such a Spiritual Master is the visible manifestation of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa in this world. He directs the disciple on behalf of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and if the disciples strictly follow the instructions of such a Spiritual Master, they surely receive divine blessings of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and they should feel spiritually fortunate.

A bona-fide Spiritual Master is said to be *sākṣat-hari* (a direct human representation of God on earth) and sometimes he is addressed as the worshiper-God. As God is full of knowledge, so should be His representative, the Spiritual Master. Being the Lord's confidential messenger on earth, he is able to guide the living entity to God, Lord Kṛṣṇa, with complete conviction. Any devotee who becomes purified can go back to Godhead, but to function as a Spiritual Master for the general mass of people, a devotee has to be qualified according to the Vedic rules.

The scriptures become available to those who have developed the desire to understand the Supreme Lord. Those who become sincere at heart are guided by the Lord from within as their Supersoul about where to find the Lord's confidential representative, the Spiritual Master, to spiritually guide them to become qualified Vaiṣṇavas. Such a special representative of

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God is obtained by spiritually fortunate people. When someone realizes that there is much more than just eating, sleeping, mating, and defending, then to such people Vaiṣṇava scriptures become available. Therefore, it is said, *sāstra chakṣuṣo bhava*: "One should see through the eyes of scriptures and develop the inner vision as per scriptural knowledge" (Pāda-sūtra).

For those who read Vaiṣṇava scriptures, their understanding of Lord Kṛṣṇa becomes very clear and philosophical. One just needs the association of an advanced devotee who is not materially motivated; then the study of scriptures and devotion to God can be realized sooner. This book, the Vaiṣṇava Kanṭha-Hāra, is our humble attempt to assist the sincere souls for furthering their knowledge of the Vedic scriptures. This book has nine chapters and they are based on the authority of different Vedic scriptures written by Śrīla Vyāsadeva, the author of the Vedānta Sūtra. We also took help from the commentaries of Vaiṣṇava āchāryas. We hope that the knowledge presented in this book will prove useful as the guidebook for all spiritual seekers desiring to march on the transcendental path of *bhaktiyoga* and reach the spiritual world.

*vaiṣṇava kanṭha-hārasya paṭhane agha nāśanam
mandarī girāṁ svāṁ vidadhe vilāsa niyamādṛtam*

This book is named Vaiṣṇava Kanṭha-Hāra (The Guidebook for the Spiritually Inclined), because by studying it, one can mitigate the misgivings that hinder one on the path of spiritual advancement. Although I lack sufficient intelligence for this and feel myself to be totally worthless, still I hope this literature will quench the spiritual thirst and satisfy the sincere spiritual seekers, since it presents the proper standards of Vaiṣṇava philosophy along with its etiquettes. Jai Śrī Rādhe.

CHAPTER ONE

ŚRĪ CHAITANYA MAHĀPRABHU



अन्धः पश्यति शास्त्राणि शिला तरति वारिधिम् ।
यस्य प्रभावतो वन्दे तं चैतन्यमीश्वरम् ॥१॥

*andhaḥ paśyati śāstrāṇi śilā tarati vāridhim
yasya prabhāvato vande tam caitanyam iśvaram*

I pay my obeisances to the Personality of Godhead Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, by whose mercy even a blind man can see scriptures, and stones can float across the ocean.

THE INCONCEIVABLE POTENCY OF LORD CHAITANYA MAHĀPRABHU

The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is accepted by all the spiritual authorities to be the cream of all the Vedas and it gives proof that Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu is Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. Lord Kṛṣṇa is God, who appeared over five thousand years ago in India and over five hundred years ago He appeared in His devotee incarnation as Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. Without being substantiated by scriptural evidence, an intelligent person should not accept anyone as the worshipable God. The Vedic scriptures are the newspapers of God that predict about God's appearance on this earth. Unless one's full detail is found in the Vedic

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scriptures, that person should not be accepted as God. The scriptural evidence must be taken as decisive proof about who God is. This chapter proves that Lord Chaitanya who appeared about five hundred years ago in India as Lord Kṛṣṇa's devotee to teach how to become a real devotee is predicted in the ancient Vedic scriptures to be Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas do not accept anything to be authentic unless it is emphatically mentioned in the ancient Vedic scriptures written five thousand years ago. That is why Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas are considered to possess fine intelligence. As stated in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, *samkīrtanah prāyair yajanti hi sumedhasah*, "Those who worship Lord Kṛṣṇa by chanting His holy names have the finest intelligence." The Chaitanya Charitāmṛta also states, *Kṛṣṇa je bhaje sei bodo chatur*, "Those who follow the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition and chant the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa are said to be the most intelligent people in human society." No Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava will ever accept anyone to be God unless the name of that person and activities are openly mentioned in the Vedic scriptures written in Sanskrit by Śrīla Vyāsadeva, the author of Vedānta philosophy. Śrīla Vyāsadeva appeared five thousand years ago and predicted the name of Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu in his writings, stating that Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu is Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. That is why Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas worship and follow Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu as God.

In His early age Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu was married and immediately thereafter He accepted Sannyāsa (renounced order) and gave up His household life. He mercifully liberated even the animals while passing through the Jhārakhanḍa Forest (Bihar, India) performing His chanting pastimes. Chanting the holy names of God is so great that even merits obtained by performing sacrifices and austerities, giving charity to the true devotees, visiting places of pilgrimage, fasting on the holy days, and performing scripturally authorized philanthropic works are

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not equal to this participation in the mission of Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. Never in the past nor ever in the future will there be a more merciful incarnation of God than Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, because He came to free the people of Kaliyuga from ignorance. Lord Chaitanya and His associates did not discriminate on the basis of caste, color, creed, or who was a fit candidate and who was not to chant the Lord's names to receive His mercy. He mercifully distributed the holy name to everyone because that is the only remedy for the conditioned souls of this age (Kaliyuga). As it is stated in the Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Ādi:

*pātrāpātra-vicāra nāhi, nahi sthānāsthāna
yei yānhā pāya, tarihā kare prema-dāna*

"In distributing love of Godhead, Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu and His associates did not consider who was a fit candidate and who was not to receive love of Godhead, nor did they consider where such distributions should or should not take place. They placed no conditions on such distribution and wherever they found the opportunity, they simply distributed love of Godhead."

THE PROOF ABOUT LORD CHAITANYA BEING GOD

*bhāgavata, bhārata-śastra, āgama, purāṇa,
caitanya kṛṣṇa avatāre prakaṭa pramāṇa*

"Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Mahābhārat, the Purāṇas, and many other Vedic literatures all give evidence to prove that Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu is the incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Ādi)

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*mahān prabhur vai puruṣaḥ sattvasyaiśa pravartakah
sunirmalam imam prāptim iśāno jyotir avyahah*

"The Supreme Personality of Godhead is called Mahāprabhu, who disseminates transcendental enlightenment and also controls everyone. Just to be in touch with Him, one has to be purified through continuous contact with His indestructible, effulgence-like spiritual life." (Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 3.12)

Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu appeared about five hundred years ago and His physical golden complexion is mentioned in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (3.1.3), which was written five thousand years ago, stating:

*yadā paśyāt paśyate rukma-varṇam
kartāram iśām puruṣam brahma-yonim*

"When one sees the golden-colored Personality of Godhead (Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu's physical complexion was that of molten gold), the Supreme Lord and Supreme Actor, who is the source of the Supreme Brahman, becomes liberated."

Five hundred years ago Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared as Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu to teach everyone how to become a real devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Thus, Lord Chaitanya is Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself as stated in the Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Madhya:

*śukla-rakta-kṛṣṇa-pīta- krame cāri varṇa
cāri varṇa dhari kṛṣṇa karena yuga dharma*

"Lord Kṛṣṇa incarnates in the four yugas—Satya, Tretā, Dvāpara, and Kali—and appears in four different colors: white, red, black, and yellow, respectively. Incarnating in these different colors in different millenniums, Lord Kṛṣṇa spreads the spiritual process of liberation meant for that particular age."

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*gauraḥ sarvātmā mahā-puruṣo mahātmā mahāyogī
tri-guṇātītāḥ saṁtva-rūpo bhaktim̄ loke kāsyati*

“Lord Chaitanya, who is also called Gaurāṅga (meaning golden-complexioned), is the all-pervading Supersoul, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and appears as a great saint and powerful mystic. He is above the three modes of material nature and is the emblem of transcendental activity. He disseminates the process of devotion throughout the world.”
(Chaitanya Upaniṣad)

Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself states the following in the *Upapurāṇa*:

*aham eva kvacid brahman sannyāsa āśramam āśritaḥ
hari-bhaktim̄ grāhayāmi kalau pāpa-hatān narān*

“I sometimes accept the renounced order of life (Sanyāsa) to induce the fallen people of this age of Kali into accepting devotional service to the Lord.”

The following evidence is found in the *Ādi Purāṇa* where Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself states:

*aham eva dvija śreṣṭha nityam̄ pracchanna vigrahaḥ
bhagavad bhakta rūpeṇa lokān rakṣāmi sarvadā*

“I Myself incarnate in a concealed form and act as a devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and thus always protect the human beings by reestablishing and introducing the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.”

Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself states the following in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*:

kalau saṅkirtanārambhe bhavisyāmi śaci-sutāḥ

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"In Kaliyuga (the present age), I shall descend as the son of mother Śachīdevī and inaugurate the *sarikīrtana* movement."

Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself also states in the Brahma-yamala thus:

*athavāham dharādhāme bhutvā mad-bhakta-rūpa dhṛk
māyāyāṁ ca bhaviṣyāmi kalau sarikīrtanāgame*

"In Kaliyuga I will personally appear on the surface of the earth in the town of Māyāpur in the garb of a devotee, specifically as the son of Śachīdevī, to start the *sarikīrtana* movement."

He also stated in the Kṛṣṇa-yamala:

puṇya-kṣetre navadvīpe bhaviṣyāmi śacī-sutāḥ

"I shall appear in the holy land of the Navadvīpa area as the son of Śachīdevī."

Also the following is found in the Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Ādi:

*āpani karimu bhakta-bhāva arigīkāre
āpani ācari'bhakti sikhāimu sabāre*

"I shall accept the role of a devotee and personally teach the process of devotional service by practicing it Myself."

*anarpita-carīm cirāt karuṇayāvatīrṇa kalau
samarpayitum unnatojjvala-rasāṁ śva-bhakti-śriyam
hariḥ puraṭa-sundara-dyuti-kadamba-sandīpitāḥ
sadā hṛdaya-kandare sphuratu vāḥ śacī-nandanaḥ*

"Lord Kṛṣṇa, by His causeless mercy, has descended in this age of Kaliyuga as the son of Śachīdevī (Lord Chaitanya

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Mahāprabhu). May that Supreme Lord become transcendently situated in the innermost core of my heart and with resplendent radiance of molten gold has descended in this age of Kaliyuga by His causeless mercy to bestow what no other incarnation has ever offered before: the most elevated mellow of transcendental service, the mellow of conjugal love.” (Vidagdha Mādhava 1.2)

*suvarṇa varṇo hemāṅgo varāṅgo varāṅgaś candanāṅgadī¹
sannyāsa-kṛcchamahā sānto niṣṭhā-sānti-parāyanāḥ*

“Lord Kṛṣṇa will appear in Kaliyuga in a molten golden complexion and, in His early pastimes, He will take to householder life. His bodily limbs will be beautiful, and He will be smeared with the pulp of sandalwood, due to which He will seem like molten gold. In His later pastimes, He will accept the Sanyāsa order, and He will be equipoised and peaceful. He will be the highest abode of peace and devotion, for He will silence the impersonalist non-devotees.” (Mahābhārat, Dāna-dharma-parva)

Lord Śiva tells the following to his wife, Pārvatī, in regard to Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu:

*ya eva bhagavān kṛṣṇo rādhikā prāṇa-vallabhāḥ
srīṣṭy ādau sa jagannātho gaura āśīna maheśvarī*

“O wife, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself, who is the life of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and the Lord of the universe, as well as the source of creation, maintenance, and annihilation, will appear as Lord Gaurasundara (another name of Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu).” (Ananta-saṁhitā)

*namo mahā-vadanyāya kṛṣṇa-prema-pradāya te
kṛṣṇāya kṛṣṇa-caitanya nāmine gaura-tviṣe namah*

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Śrī Rūpa Goswāmī prayed, "O most munificent incarnation! You are Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself and have now appeared as Śrī Kṛṣṇa Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. You have assumed the golden color of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and You are widely distributing pure love of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. We offer our respectful obeisances unto You." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Madhya)

*ittham nṛ-tiryag-ṛṣi-deva-jhaṣāvatārair
lokān vibhāvayasi harṣi jagat pratipān
dharmam mahā-puruṣa pāsi yugānuvṛttam
channah kalau yad abhavas tri-yugo 'tha sa tvam*

Prahlāda Mahārāja said, "O my Lord, You appear in various incarnations, such as in the human beings, in the animals, among the saints, in the demigods, and among the aquatics, and thus maintain the entire creation in different planetary systems and kill the demoniac who oppose the spiritual principles. According to the age, O my Lord, You protect the principles of religion. In the age of Kali, however, You do not assert Yourself as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and therefore You are known as Triyugī, or the Lord who appears in three yugas." (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 7.9.38)

CHANTING THE LORD'S HOLY NAMES

*dhyāyan kṛte yajan yajñais tretāyāṁ dvāpare'rccayāṁ
yad āpnoti tad āpnoti kalau saṅkīrtya keśavam*

"Whatever merit one had achieved in Satyayuga by performing meditation, in Tretāyuga by performing sacrifices,

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and in Dvāparayuga by worshiping the Deity of the Lord, the same merit can be achieved in Kaliyuga just by chanting the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is also called Keśava.” (Viṣṇu Purāṇa)

Śrī Advaitāchārya invited Lord Kṛṣṇa to appear on earth to inaugurate the chanting of the holy name. That is why He appeared as Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. It is stated in the Brahmānda Purāṇa, “In Kaliyuga, if someone chants the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, saying, ‘Govinda, Govinda,’ that person becomes free from more sins than could have been removed by performing *pakṣa* fasting or *chāndrāyaṇa* fasting (short duration fasting and long duration fasting, respectively), performing great austerities, and observing many vows and rituals.” Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself says in the Mahābhārata, “Since Draupadī once called Me, saying ‘O Govinda!’ I became greatly indebted to her and this feeling does not leave My heart.” Although presently separated from the Lord, if the living entity cries out with heart-felt feelings by saying, “O Govinda!” then the Supreme Lord becomes obliged to that devotee and becomes very attached to that devotee. In other words, the Lord constantly thinks of His yearning devotee.

When Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī and his younger brother Śrī Vallabha saw Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, they placed clumps of straw between their teeth, paid their obeisances, and prayed to Him, saying that He is Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, but has appeared now in the mood of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu is *rādhā-bhāva-dyuti-suvalita*—Lord Chaitanya is Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, playing the role of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī to understand the nature and the mood of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī’s love for Him. Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu was always in the mood of Rādhārāṇī. For example, worship in the Jagannāth Puri temple is *aiśvarya-bhāva*, in the mood of opulence, as it is in Dvārakā. But in the Gūḍichā temple, the worship is in *mādhūrya-bhāva*, or in the conjugal mood, as it is in Vṛndāban. During the Rathayātrā festival, Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu’s dancing would bring Lord Jagannāth to His cart

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from the Jagannāth temple and then to the Guṇḍichā temple in the mood of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, depicting leading Kṛṣṇa to Vṛindāban from Dvārakā. This confirms that Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu appeared in the mood of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.

THE POTENCY OF LORD CHAITANYA'S MISSION

*'pīta'-varṇa dhārī' tabe kaila pravartana
prema-bhaktī dila loke lanā bhakta-gana*

"In the age of Kaliyuga, Lord Kṛṣṇa accepts His golden color form as Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu accompanied by His personal associates and devotees, introduces *harināma-saṅkīrtana*, the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra, and thus delivers the general populace by giving love of Godhead." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Madhya)

*kalau kṛta yugam tasya kalis tasya kṛte yuge
yasya cetasi govindo hṛdaye yasya na acyuta*

"For anyone who has Lord Govinda in the heart in the form of chanting His holy name, for that person Kaliyuga turns into Satyayuga. But for anyone who does not remember Lord Govinda, or chant His holy name, even Satyayuga turns into Kaliyuga." (Viṣṇu-dharma)

A real incarnation of the Lord never claims to be God, only the great sages determine that He is God by basing His transcendental qualities and activities on the revealed scriptures. The incarnations of God appear in different colors according to the age—white, red, black, and yellow—and Chaitanya Mahāprabhu is yellow in color. Thus, the Vedic scriptures state that Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu is Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, who had

appeared in Dvāparayuga. No one should be accepted as God or an incarnation of God unless His name is confirmed in the revealed scriptures. According to the indication of the revealed scriptures, Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, who appeared in Kaliyuga, is God Himself, but played the part of a devotee. For anyone who follows Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, Kaliyuga becomes equal to Satyayuga. For this reason, everyone is invited to study and follow what Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu had taught.

Only the eternal Personality of Godhead is able to free the living entity from the shackles of the material world and award liberation. The living entity's constitutional position is marginal. That means that although the nature of the living entity is to be in knowledge of the Lord as His eternal servant, still, due to associating with this material world, the living entity becomes inclined to reject the supremacy of the Supreme Lord. But when Kṛṣṇa consciousness is introduced, the living entity, being the marginal potency, follows it and becomes purified and perfect.

The potency of Lord Viṣṇu is summarized in three categories, namely the spiritual potency, the living entities, and the material energy. The spiritual potency is full of knowledge; the living entities, although belonging to the spiritual potency, are subjected to illusion and thus are called the marginal potency. The material energy, which is full of ignorance, is always visible in fruitive activities.

The Supreme Personality of Godhead appears in different incarnations to free the living entities from ignorance by delivering them the true knowledge. Therefore, He directly appears in the form of a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master to teach mankind. Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself said, "One should know the Āchārya (scripturally authentic Spiritual Master) as Myself and never disrespect him in any way. One should not envy him, thinking him to be an ordinary man, for he is the total

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representation of all the demigods." (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam) Therefore, one should never have a material conception about such a Spiritual Master because He is the supreme potency of the Lord in the form that looks like a human being. The Spiritual Master is the most confidential servant of the Lord, and because he is so intimately connected with the Lord as His confidential representative, he should be worshiped equal to God.

*kṛṣṇa varṇam tviṣākṛṣṇam sāṅgopāṅgāstra-pārṣadam
yajñaiḥ sārīkṛtana-prāyair yajanti hi sumedhasaḥ*

"In Kaliyuga, the Supreme Lord appears in His concealed form looking like His devotee and personally chants the names of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Although His physical complexion is not blackish, nevertheless He is Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. He is accompanied by His associates, servants, overpowering musical instruments, and confidential companions. Those who have fine intelligence will worship Him by repeating the same names as He Himself chants and thus worship the incarnation of Godhead who constantly sings the names of Kṛṣṇa.." (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11.5.32)

*antaḥ kṛṣṇam bahir gauram darsītāṅgādi varibhavam
kalau sārīkṛtānādyaiḥ smāḥ kṛṣṇa caitanyam āśritāḥ*

"I take shelter of that great personality, Lord Śrī Gaurasundara, who appears in Kaliyuga along with His plenary portions and incarnations. He is none other than Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. He is blackish on the inside and is golden-complexioned on the outside. Such is Lord Chaitanya, who appeared in this age to introduce the *sārīkṛtana* movement." (Tattva-sandharbha 2)

Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is fully satisfied in His own abode, out of compassion for the living entities, mercifully appeared in this material world in the garb of a devotee, as Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. In other words, in the spiritual world there are no

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miseries of any kind, nor is there any need for sunlight or moonlight, the Lord is always fully satisfied there, but still He mercifully appears in this world to deliver the conditioned souls by giving them the holy name. As it is stated in the Chaitanya-Charitāmṛta Ādi:

*saṅkīrtana-pravartaka śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya
saṅkīrtana-yajñe tanre bhaje, sei dhanya*

"Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu is the initiator of the *saṅkīrtana* movement, in which congregational chanting of the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa is performed. One who worships Him through chanting the holy name is fortunate indeed."

*sajjana, durjana, parigu, jaḍa, andhagaṇa
prema-vanyāya ḍuvāīla jagatera jana*

"The river-like movement started by Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu inundated the entire world and drowned everyone, whether they were gentlemen, rogues, lame, invalid, or blind." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Ādi)

*caitanyāvatāre vahe premāmṛta-vanyā
sabe jīva preme bhāse, pṛthivī haila dhanyā*

"Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu appeared and started the flood of eternal nectar-like love of Godhead in which all living entities are lovingly floating. The entire world is now thankful to Him." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Antya)

*sūrya-candra hare yaiche saba andhakāra
vastu prakāśiyā kare dharmera pracāra
ei mata dui bhāī jīvera ājñāna-
tamo-nāśa kari' kaila tattva-vastu-dāna*

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"As the sun and moon drive away darkness by their appearance and reveal the nature of everything, similarly these two brothers—Lord Chaitanya and Lord Nityānanda—dissipate the darkness of ignorance of all the living beings and enlighten them with knowledge of the Absolute Truth." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Ādi)

*adyāpiha caitanya ei saba līlā kare
yāra bhāgyathāke se dekhāye nirantare*

"Even today Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu performs all kinds of pastimes in the universe, but only those who are sufficiently fortunate are able to see them constantly." (Chaitanya Bhāgavata Madhya)

The fortunate ones have the opportunity to have a glimpse of Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu's eternally performed pastimes. To become fortunate, one has to follow what the Lord says in the revealed scriptures. For example, the Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa states that if anybody wholeheartedly says, "O Lord, O Janārdana, I have come to take shelter at Your lotus feet," He will surely mitigate their problems. Because Lord Chaitanya introduced this medicine-like chanting of the holy name, He is called the most magnanimous incarnation. Those who chant the holy name of the Lord are glorified in the scriptures. It is stated in the Mahābhārat, Udyoga-parva, that Kṛṣṇa is an eternal personality, and His name, which is non-different from Him, is also eternal. Therefore, those who regularly chant Kṛṣṇa's name realize their own eternal nature and go back to Godhead.

THE BENEFITS OF CHANTING LORD KRŚNA'S NAMES

kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa iti kṛṣṇa iti yo mām smarati nityasah

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jalaṁ bhītvā yathā padmaṁ narakād uddhārayāmy aham

The Supreme Lord says, "If anyone chants My name, saying, 'Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa,' I free that person from hellish conditions of life just like a lotus flower that rises above the water and remains untouched by it." (Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa)

How much importance He gives to His true devotees He states in the Garuḍa Purāṇa thus:

*na me bhaktaś caturvedī mad bhaktaḥ śvapacāḥ priyāḥ
tasmai deyarāṁ tato grāhyāṁ sa ca pūjyo yathā hy aham*

"A Brāhmaṇa who is not My true devotee, even though learned in the four Vedas, is not dear to Me; but one who is My real and sincere devotee who may be born in a *chāṇḍāla* (dog-eater) family, is dear to Me. That sincere devotee should be given gifts to and one should receive gifts from that devotee because that devotee is as honorable as I am."

THE MAGNANIMITY AND MERCY OF LORD CHAITANYA

*svatantra iśvara prabhu atyanta udāra
tarire nā bhajile kabhu nā haya nistāra*

"Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu is the independent Supreme Personality of Godhead and is very magnanimous. One who does not worship Him can never obtain liberation." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Ādi)

*'kṛṣṇa' ei dui varṇa sadā yāñra mukhe
athavā, kṛṣṇake tihori varṇe nija sukhe*

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"God will appear and will always pronounce these two syllables "kr̄ṣ and ṇā" from His lips; or else He constantly describes about Kṛṣṇa for His own pleasure." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Ādi)

THE SUPREME LORD'S HOLY NAME

*nāma cintāmaṇīḥ kṛṣṇaś caitanya rasa vigrahāḥ
pūrṇaḥ śuddho nitya mukto 'bhinnatvān nāma nāminoḥ*

"The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is like the *chintāmaṇi* gem (an anxiety removing gem). It is transcendental and holy. It is able to reward all blissful spiritual benedictions and is filled with all kinds of transcendental pleasures. It is completely pure, free from all kinds of material contamination, and is non-different from Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself." (Padyāvalī 25)

*madhura madhuram etan marigalāṁ marigalānāṁ
sakala nigamavallī sat phalāṁ cit svarūpam
sakṛdapi pari gītāṁ śraddhayā helayā vā
bhṛguvara! naramātrāṁ tārayet kṛṣṇa nāma*

"The holy name of the Lord is sweeter than the sweetest and more auspicious than the most auspicious things of this world. It is the most beneficial fruit of the Vedic desire tree and is non-different from the Personality of Godhead. For anyone who repeats it even once, whether in full consciousness, by chance, or even with rejection, it easily takes one across the material ocean of birth and death." (Padyāvalī 26)

*jitan tena jitan tena jitan tena iti niścītam
jihvāgre vartate yasya harir iti akṣara dvayam*

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"If anyone has these two syllables 'ha' and 'ri' on the tip of their tongue, then without a doubt Lord Kṛṣṇa comes under control of that person—this is indisputably true." (Viṣṇu Dharma)

It is confirmed by Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gītā that a little advancement on the spiritual path can save one from the most dangerous type of fear. But to fully realize the Lord one has to develop real love for God which comes, in due course, through regular practice of spiritual life.

*kīta pakṣī mṛgāṇāṁ ca harau sannyasta cetasāṁ
urdhvam eva gatim manye kim punar jñāniṇām nṛṇām*

"Any entity who is conscious of Lord Kṛṣṇa, even if that entity is in the form of a moth, bird, or beast—what to speak of a very learned human being—that entity certainly obtains liberation from this world." (Bhakti Sandarbha 303)

*mūkam karoti vācālam parigum laṅghayate girim
yat kṛpā tamahām vande paramānanda mādhavam*

"I pay my most humble obeisances unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is also known as Lord Mādhava, by whose mercy a dumb man can speak perfectly well and a lame man can cross over a mountain." (Bhāvārtha Dīpikā)

Thus ends the First Chapter of the Vrajavāsī Realization.

THE SURRENDERED SOULS



निमिषं निमिषार्धं वा यत्र तिष्ठति वैष्णवः ।
तदेव परमं स्थानं ततीर्थं तत् तपोवनम् ॥२॥

*nimiṣam nimiṣārdham vā yatra tiṣṭhati vaiṣṇavah
tadeva paramāṁsthānam tat tītham tat tapovanam*

If a Vaiṣṇava resides in some place just for a moment or even for half a moment, that place becomes as holy as a place of pilgrimage or austerity.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD "VAIṢNAVA"

One may wonder what a Vaiṣṇava is, what is the meaning of Vaiṣṇava, and why does the position "Vaiṣṇava" not appear either in the social orders or in the spiritual orders of the varṇāśrama system? The Vedic scriptures were put into writing five thousand years ago where it is stated that the position of a Vaiṣṇava is not ordinary because it indicates to a person who is directly related to Lord Viṣṇu. As it is stated in the Rgveda, First Maṇḍal:

kiñca veṣati siñcati pālayati sarvam idam jagad iti viṣṇuḥ

"The Supreme Lord is called Viṣṇu because He

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impregnates and maintains the entire creation, and anyone who is related to Him is called a Vaiṣṇava.”

The word Viṣṇu has come from the root code *viṣlvyāptau* of the Siddhānta Kaumudī (a code book of Sanskrit grammar). From this grammatical code, the name Viṣṇu results in the following, which defines why the Supreme Lord is named Viṣṇu:

veveṣṭī sarvam̄ sarvatra vā vyāptoti prāpnoti iti viṣṇuh

“Since the Supreme Lord is present everywhere and seated inside everyone and in everything, the Supreme Lord is called Viṣṇu.”

Since no one, including the demigods, has such qualities, they are not called Viṣṇu. Thus, they are not equal to Him and no one else can be called Viṣṇu.

According to another section of the book of Sanskrit grammar, if the *aṇ pratyaya* (the suffix *aṇ*) is used on the word *Viṣṇu*, and then *taddhīteśvacāmāde* with *ādivrddhi* and *oguṇa sūtras* of the Siddhānta Kaumudī are applied with *sup pratyaya* (suffix), then the word *Viṣṇu* turns into the word Vaiṣṇava, meaning the follower of Lord Viṣṇu.

When we define the word Vaiṣṇava in the Pāṇinī Vyākaraṇa code, *sa asya devatā* (Pāṇinī Sūtra 4.2.24), with *aṇ pratyaya* (the suffix *aṇ*) in application to the Lord, then the grammatical explanation results in the following:

viṣṇu devatā asyeti vaiṣṇavah te vaiṣṇavah

“Whosoever has accepted Lord Śrī Viṣṇu as the worshipable Lord is called a Vaiṣṇava.”

This means a person who accepts Lord Viṣṇu as the Supreme Personality of Godhead and takes spiritual initiation in

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His unbroken chain is accepted as a Vaiṣṇava in Vedic civilization.

When Pāṇinī Sūtra (4.1.93) *eko gotre* is applied to the word *Vaiṣṇava*, along with *aṇ pratyaya* (the suffix *aṇ*) in the mood of dynasty, then the Sanskrit explanation becomes the following:

viṣṇor gotram 'patyam vaiṣṇavāḥ te

"Those people who accept spiritual initiation from a scripturally authorized Spiritual Master fall in the direct family line of Lord Viṣṇu and are addressed as Vaiṣṇavas." (the word *apatyā* signifies an unbroken chain of ancestry or an unbroken chain of Guru-disciplic succession.)

If the word *Vaiṣṇava* is further defined by using Pāṇinī sūtra (4.2.59) *tad adhīte tad vedāḥ*, with *aṇ pratyaya*, then the grammatical definition of the word *Vaiṣṇava* becomes:

viṣṇor upadeśam adhīte veda vā iti vaiṣṇavāḥ te

"Those people who are initiated understand the instructions of Lord Viṣṇu, or those who desire to follow His instructions or want to know Him are given the title *Vaiṣṇava*."

When the word *Vaiṣṇava* is further clarified by using Pāṇinī Sūtra (4.3.120), *tasyedam*, with the code of *saṣṭhyanta samartha* in the matter of relationship with the Lord, along with

Note: In English grammar, root word/suffix combinations clearly show their components. However, just as an electrically combined mixture of double hydrogen and single oxygen produces water, so in Sanskrit grammar root word/suffix combinations produce a new word or a statement with no resemblance to its components or to the grammatical code used to combine them. If the reader has difficulty understanding the technical grammatical descriptions given in this chapter, the reader can simply read the conclusions.

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using the suffix *aṇ*, then the grammatical explanation becomes:

*'viṣṇor idam' iti vaisṇavarāṁ nāma vā anukaraṇaṁ
tat bhavati yeṣu iti te vaisṇavāḥ*

"Those 'who relate as servants to Lord Viṣṇu,' who mark their bodies with His names by using *tilaka* marks, and follow Him unconditionally are called Vaiṣṇavas."

When the word *Vaiṣṇava* is further defined by using Pāṇini Sūtra (4.3.74), *tat āgataḥ*, with the code of *pañcamyānta samartha* together with the suffix *aṇ*, then the grammatical explanation becomes:

paramparāyā śiśyatvena viṣṇor āgataḥ iti vaisṇavāḥ

"Those who are initiated in the unbroken chain of disciplic succession coming down from Lord Viṣṇu are called Vaiṣṇavas."

Lord Kṛṣṇa, Lord Viṣṇu, Lord Rāma, and all of His incarnations are the same in potency, therefore those who follow any of them are addressed as Vaiṣṇavas.

QUALIFICATIONS OF A VAIŚNAVA

Traditionally all spiritual authorities are called Vaiṣṇava Āchāryas, such as Rāmānujāchārya, Madhvāchārya, Viṣṇuswāmi, and Nimbārkāchāya. They understood the true meaning of the word *Vaiṣṇava* and thus concluded that one who is addressed in this way (as a Vaiṣṇava) should perform five specific Vaiṣṇava ceremonies. Such as:

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*puṇḍram mudrā tathā nāma mālā mantras tu pañcamah
amīhi pañca sanskārāḥ paramaikāntya hetavaḥ
pañca sanskāra sanskr̥to yaḥ sa vaiṣṇavo anyathā iti*

"Only the person who performs the five Vaiṣṇava ceremonies, namely (1) putting *tilaka* mark which goes upwards like a flame on the forehead and assigned parts of the body; (2) performing *mudrās* (spiritual hand gestures); (3) accepting initiation in the unbroken chain of Vaiṣṇava disciplic succession; (4) chanting the holy names of Lord Viṣṇu (Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, or Nārāyaṇa) on beads, and (5) chanting the assigned Gāyatrī mantras to please their worshipable Lord to attain love of Godhead is addressed as a Vaiṣṇava—besides these no one else is called a Vaiṣṇava." (Rāma Paddhatī)

*(klīñca) yajurvede hiranya keśi śākhāyām udhṛta
ūrdhva puṇḍra udara cakra dhārī viṣṇu param
dhyāyati yo mahātmā svareṇa mantreṇa sadā
hṛdisthitam parātparam sa yāti mahato mahīyām*

Furthermore, "It is quoted in the Hiranyaśeśi branch of the Yajurveda, that 'Any spiritualist who has a *tilaka* mark on the forehead that goes upwards like a flame; who worships the Supreme Lord Śrī Viṣṇu, the holder of the disc; who engages in meditating on the Supreme Lord through bhaktiyoga; who chants the Vaiṣṇava Mahāmantra melodiously; who always keeps the Supreme Lord in the heart; who is transcendental to material influences; and who desires to go back to Godhead—such a great soul is called a Vaiṣṇava.' (Rāma Paṭala)

*śārikha cakra dharo vidvān mālā
tulasijāṁ dhrtaḥ sa jīvan muktaḥ
paramātmānaḥ sapriyo bhavati tasya
darśanāt pāvano bhavati iti*

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"Anyone who marks their body with *tilaka* and the symbols of the Lord's conchshell and disc, who wears *tulasī* neckbeads, and who chants the holy name of the Lord on *tulasī* beads is understood to be liberated even while alive. Such a person is certified as a Vaiśnava because such a person is dear to the Supreme Lord and just by looking at such a Vaiśnava, one receives purity." (Atharvaveda and Rāmatāpanī Upaniṣad)

*ādyantu sarikha cakra ādi dhāraṇam vaiśnavam smṛtam
nāma puṇḍram kriyā caiva mantrāś caivārcanam hareḥ
saṁskārā pañca kartavyā brāhmaṇasya vidhānataḥ
vidhinā śārikha cakrādi dhārayed ūrdhva puṇḍrakam*

"There are five *saṁskāras* (ceremonies) to be a Vaiśnava and to become eligible to serve the Supreme Lord. These are: (1) to take spiritual initiation from a scripturally authorized Guru, (2) to wear *tilaka* marks that extend upwards like a flame, (3) to chant the *mantras* received through the disciplic succession, (4) to wear *tulasī* neckbeads, and (5) to chant the holy names on *tulasī japa* beads. Even a Brāhmaṇa should systematically go through these five ceremonies." (Pārāśara Smṛti)

None of the great Vaiśnava Āchāryas have differed on the above mentioned points, and if they did, then to a very insignificant degree, just to differentiate their tradition from another's.

*...udāradhī sadā dayā paro 'dhogatī hetu rūpāya
cirāya labhyam bhava bhīti vṛttaye vaiśnavah*

"Any magnanimous devotee is very generous by nature, is always merciful towards all living entities, and remains fearful of falling into the lower species in the next life—that devotee is addressed as a Vaiśnava." (Rāmānanda Digvijaya 12)

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*vācyāny aruntudā vācānsi kadāpi naiva dambha
pramāda paranindā na kaṭu vāni tyājyāni
dāśarathī padma pādānuraktaih
satya vrataṁ prati dinam pari pālaniyam*

“A Vaiṣṇava is a person who has taken shelter at the lotus feet of the Personality of Godhead and does not disturb the minds of others in any way. A Vaiṣṇava neither speaks harsh words, nor is proud, arrogant, lazy, or critical towards others. A Vaiṣṇava gives up all demoniac qualities and always remains truthful to Guru and the Lord.” (Rāmānanda Digvijaya 16)

A devotee is very conscientious not to disturb anyone and this is confirmed by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad Gītā, chapter twelve. Mārkaṇḍeya Muni also states to King Bhagīratha in the Skanda Purāṇa thus:

*prāṇatyāye na cāṣṇānti dinam prāpya harer narah
kurvanti jāgaram rātrau sadā bhāgavatā hi te
upoṣya dvādaśīm Śuddham rātrau jāgaraṇānvitam
alpāntu sādhayed yas tu sa vai bhāgavatonarah*

“Those people who fast from eating all grains and beans on Ekādaśī (The Day of Lord Hari), even at the cost of their lives, try to remain awake overnight, and properly break their fast on the next (Dvādaśī) day, they obtain full purity of the fast. Such devotees should be considered to be very advanced devotees.”

A symptom of a Vaiṣṇava is that, just to increase their devotion to the Supreme Lord, a Vaiṣṇava offers the merits received from their Ekādaśī fast to the Lord thinking that the Ekādaśī day is very dear to the Lord. Only by following the spiritual process can one develop proper devotion to the Lord. One should certainly become attached to the Lord. Serious Vaiṣṇavas always fast on the Lord’s days according to their

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capacity, following rules and regulations of the Vedic scriptures, and they follow the Kārtika month. A devotee never deviates from spiritual functions at any time, and thus becomes very dear to the Supreme Lord.

*rukṣa akṣara girāḥ sṛṣṇuṇ tathā bhāgavatārtitah
praṇāma pūrvakam kṣāntvā yo vaded vaiṣṇavo hi saḥ*

"Any devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead who tolerates harsh and dry words that come from another devotee and instead pays respects to that devotee, such a devotee is certainly recognized as a real Vaiṣṇava." (Liṅga Purāṇā)

SYMPTOMS OF A VAIŚNAVA

*dhṛti kṣamā damo'steyam śaucam indriya nigrahaḥ
dhīr vidyā satyam akrodho daśakam dharma lakṣaṇam*

"A Vaiṣṇava is recognized by ten pious symptoms, namely patience, forgiveness, self-control, theism, cleanliness, sense control, possessing realized knowledge, Vedic education, truthfulness, and freedom from anger." (Manu Smṛuti)

Śrī Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Goswami, the author of the Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, states that all good qualities slowly develop in a serious Vaiṣṇava, and by the presence of good qualities, one can distinguish a Vaiṣṇava from a normal person. A person can be recognized as a Vaiṣṇava if that person continues engaging in normal social and spiritual duties, does not usurp anyone's wealth, does not torture anyone, has equal vision towards friends and foes, is steady in mind and free from ignorance, devotes their valuable time fully in devotional service,

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and constantly performs scripturally authorized deeds to please Lord Kṛṣṇa. Seeing such transcendental qualities of a devotee like the external bodily marks, such as *tilaka*, the messengers of Yamarāja shake with fear, just as a frog becomes frightened by seeing a cobra.

According to the Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa, a Vaiṣṇava feels ecstatic just by hearing the transcendental narrations of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, their hairs stand on end, and the Vaiṣṇava feels satisfied within the mind, thinking that Lord Kṛṣṇa's instructions which are stated in the Bhagavad Gītā are being followed.

THE RARENESS AND VALUE OF VAIŚNAVAS

*īdṛk lakṣaṇa vantaḥ syur durlabhā vahavo janāḥ
divyā hi maṇayo vyaktam na varterann itastataḥ*

"Very few devotees possess all of the above-mentioned symptoms, because a priceless gem-like *chintāmaṇi* is not available just anywhere." (Garuḍa Purāṇa)

Devotees engaged in karma or jñāna—mixed devotional service—are not difficult to find, but it is very difficult to find an unalloyed devotee. As it is said in the Hari-bhakti-śuddhodaya, *sudurlabhā bhāgavatā hi loke*, "The *chintāmaṇi* gem-like pure devotees are not easily available to everyone, but only those who are fortunate can easily find them."

Wherever pure Vaiṣṇavas stay, Lord Brahmā, Lord Śiva, and the other demigods also come to reside there. What to speak of serving a pure devotee, just by seeing or looking at a pure devotee one becomes purified and eligible for liberation. Even a sinner becomes elevated just by being seen by the servants of such pure devotees. This is confirmed by the

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Viṣṇudūṭas in the Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa. The reason is that such a devotee is very compassionate and constantly glorifies the Lord. He exchanges his merits for the sins of the person who comes to see him. The Chaitanya Charitāmṛta states, *sādhukṛpā nāma vinā 'prema'nā janmaya*, "Without the mercy of a pure devotee and without the chanting of the holy name of the Lord, love of Godhead cannot be possible." (See Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 10.14.29.)

*gatvā gatvā nivartante candra sūryādayo grahāḥ
adyāpi na nivartante dvādaśākṣara cintakāḥ*

"If someone elevates himself to the sun or moon planet by their acquired merits, still they have to again return to this world, but a person who chants the twelve syllable mantra (*om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*) never returns here again to this world." (Mahābhārat, Śāntiparva)

A Vaiṣṇava is transcendental to this world and is destined for the spiritual world due to performing uncommon devotion and obtaining realizations of the Supreme Lord. Still, some people may argue that the class "Vaiṣṇava" does not fall within the *varṇāśrama* system, therefore a Vaiṣṇava is not to be respected. However, the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam supports that Vaiṣṇavism is not a man-made concoction but has existed since time immemorial. In the beginning of creation when Pr̥thu Mahārāja ruled over the seven islands on the surface of the globe, no one could disobey his irrevocable orders except for the saintly persons, the Brāhmaṇas, and the Vaiṣṇavas (the descendants of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.) This means he properly respected the Vaiṣṇavas. In this regard, Śrīla Śrīdhara Swāmī gives his commentary, stating, *acyuto gotra pravartaka tulyo yeśāṁ vaiṣṇavānāṁ iti*: "If someone is skeptical whether Vaiṣṇavism is included in the four social and four spiritual orders of human life, their doubt is not valid, because

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according to Śrīla Vyāsadeva, when Pṛthu Mahārāja was ruling the earth, his orders were accepted by everyone. He would personally punish the criminals, but not the Brāhmaṇas and the Vaiṣṇavas. These two were not within his managerial jurisdiction of punishment." (Śrīdhārī-tīkā)

Thus the statement of Śrīla Vyāsadeva in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (4.21.12) confirms the superiority of the Vaiṣṇava order. When the four Kumāras spoke Śrīmad Bhāgavatam on the bank of Ganges, Nārada Muni requested Vaiṣṇavas to sit on the frontline to listen to the narration of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. Therefore, to think that Vaiṣṇavas are not included in the social or spiritual orders of human civilization is invalid. Vaiṣṇavas existed on earth since time immemorial. Even though "Vaiṣṇava" is not specifically listed as one of the four social orders—Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Sūdra—Vaiṣṇavas are accepted by all sages to be their leaders, as confirmed in the following verse:

*r̥ṣyāder āśramal loke dvijādī jātayo yathā
tathā adhyātma sādhūbhyo jñeya vaiṣṇava jātayah*

"The sages have recognized the Brāhmaṇas to be the leaders of all social orders and the Vaiṣṇavas to be the leaders of all the Brāhmaṇas and the spiritual orders." (Vaiṣṇavamatābja-bhāskara 7.3, Tṛtiya-praśna)

It is found in the Śrīmad Bhāgavata-māhātmya (3.23) that when Nārada Muni heard Śrīmad Bhāgavatam from Sanat Kumāra, he honored the Vaiṣṇavas, the Brahmachārīs (celibates), and the Sannyāsīs (people in the renounced order) by making them sit in front of him. This proves that a Vaiṣṇava's position is extraordinary.

*tilaka hīnāṁ yathā vīprā amarahīnāṁ yathā rājānāḥ
āyudhahīnāṁ yathā sūrā nānaka dharmahīnāṁ tathā vaiṣṇavāḥ*

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Guru Nānaka says: "As a twice born Brāhmaṇa without *tilaka* marks on his body, a king without his beautiful palace, and a soldier without his weapons are considered incomplete, similarly, a Vaiśnava is a Vaiśnava in name only without strict and regular practice of devotional service." (Guru-granthasāhib, mah 1)

The position of Vaiśnavas is even recognized by impersonalists. The poet Kabīra dāsa glorifies a Vaiśnava by praying to the Lord to be born in the house of a sincere Vaiśnava. He sings:

*vaiśṇon kī kūkar bhalī sākata kī burimāya
oh! nitya sunairī harināma jasa oh! Pāpa vihājana jāya*

"It is better to be born even as a dog living nearby a Vaiśnava than as a human being in the house of a rich sinful materialist, because in one place chanting of the holy name of the glorious Lord will be heard, and in the other place accumulation of sins will occur." (Kabīra dāsa)

A true Vaiśnava is not an ordinary person. In every scripture, the position of the Vaiśnava is recognized as topmost. The stage of a Vaiśnava is the post-graduate stage and above twice-born traditional Brāhmaṇas. The Padma Purāṇa states, *vaiśṇavo varṇa vāhyo'pi punāti bhuvana trayam*: "Even if a pure Vaiśnava is born in an outcaste family, he is able to purify the three worlds." Thus, service to a Vaiśnava should be carefully performed, without committing any mental, verbal, or physical offenses. Offenses against a pure Vaiśnava cannot be mitigated by any means, as it is found in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam in the history of Durvāsā Muni and Ambarīṣa Mahārāja. In this connection the Yajurveda states:

*rakṣohāṇo vo vala gahanaḥ prokṣāmi vaiśnavān
rakṣohāṇo vo vala gahano' vanayāmī vaiśnavān,*

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*rakṣohāṇo vo valagahano 'vastṛṇāmī vaiṣṇavān,
rakṣohāṇau to valagahānau paryuhāmī vaiṣṇavī
rakṣohāṇau vāṁ valagahāna upadadhāmī vaiṣṇvī
vaiṣṇavām asī vaiṣṇavāsthā*

"If a Vaiṣṇava is free from sin I wash his feet with scented water. If a Vaiṣṇava conquers the eternal miseries—birth, disease, old age, and death—I worship him with nice flowers. I honor both—the leading Vaiṣṇava (Guru) and his true disciple—and worship them by placing them on a nice seat because they are austere and filled with realized knowledge. These devotees are so strict that their bodies are decorated with the *tilaka* marks of Lord Viṣṇu, thus qualifying them as Vaiṣṇavas." (Yajurveda 5.25)

Lord Kapiladeva describes the qualities of a real Vaiṣṇava to His mother, Devahūti, saying, "The symptoms of a *sādhu* (Vaiṣṇava) are that he is tolerant, merciful, and friendly to all living entities. He has no enemies, he is peaceful, he abides by the scriptures, and all his characteristics are sublime. Such a *sādhu* engages in staunch, undeviating devotional service to the Lord. For the sake of the Lord, he renounces all material connections, such as family relations and friendly acquaintances within the world. O My mother, O virtuous lady, these are the qualities of great devotees who are free from all kinds of material attachments. You must develop attachment to such holy men, for this counteracts the pernicious effects of material attachment." (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 3.25.21, 22 and 24) Furthermore, it is stated in the Mahābhārat, Sāntiparva, that if a Vaiṣṇava even once pays obeisances to Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he achieves the merit of performing ten horse sacrifices. Yet although the performer of ten horse sacrifices returns to this material world with the cessation of his merits, this Vaiṣṇava does not take birth again.

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*te sarva tīrtha āśrayabhuṭa deha
deśe mahā bhāgavatam̄ vaśanti
tatraiva tad darśana tat sthitibhya
jātaḥ sapuṇyaḥ nikhilāgha sūnyaḥ*

"All the places of pilgrimage come to reside in the residence of a pure Vaiṣṇava. Therefore, everyone living in the vicinity of that place becomes purified, meritorious, and free from sins just by seeing the pure Vaiṣṇava; and by touching the dust of his lotus feet, one becomes purified." (Vaiṣṇavamatābja-bhāskara 7)

THE PURIFYING REMNANTS OF A VAIŚNAVA

*vaiśṇava pada dhūli vaiśṇava pada jala
vaiśṇava bhukta avaśeṣa tīni mahā bala*

"The water that has washed the lotus feet of a pure Vaiṣṇava; the dust of his lotus feet; and his leftover food from his plate, due to including his saliva in it; are the three greatest sources of spiritual strength in this world." (Chaitanya Bhāgavata)

*prārthayed vaiśnavasyānnam̄ prayatnena vicakṣaṇaḥ
sarva pāpa viśudhyārtham̄ tad abhāve jalām̄ pivot
govindeti japan mantram̄ kutracin mriyate yadī
sa naro na yamaṇ̄ paśyed tam̄ na īkṣāmahe vayam̄*

The Yamadūtas said, "To purify oneself of all sins, an intelligent person should carefully beg for the remnants of food that is left by a pure Vaiṣṇava on his eating plate. If this is not available, then one should drink some water that is left in the

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cup by a pure Vaiṣṇava because it contains his saliva. If one does this, and chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra, it does not matter where that person's death takes place, that person will never see the place of Yamarāja (hell), nor will they see us (the messengers of hell) who come to fetch one at death." (Padma Purāṇa, Svarga khaṇḍa)

By worshiping and associating with a pure devotee of the Lord, by drinking a little water that has washed his lotus feet, and by paying obeisances to him and eating his leftover remnants, even without his approval, one can destroy their sins that were accumulated for millions of births. It is true that anybody who is a real devotee of a pure devotee, offers some edibles to that Vaiṣṇava devotee, and then eats his remnants without feeling any disgust, surely achieves liberation. Even though a pure Vaiṣṇava is naturally honored by others, he always feels lowly in his heart. He never thinks himself to be great. With this mood, he transfers the worship he received to his Guru who then transfers it to Lord Kṛṣṇa. The greatness of a pure devotee is due to his constantly remembering Lord Kṛṣṇa intensely.

*tad arcanāt tad pāda nirapaṇāt
tat saṅgataḥ tat praṇaveti dhānāt
tad bhojana anantara bhajanāc ca syāt
koti janma arjita pāpa nāśah*

"By worshiping and associating with a pure devotee of the Lord, drinking some water that has washed his lotus feet, paying obeisances to him, and eating what he left in his eating plate, one can destroy the sins that were accumulated for millions of births." (Vaiṣṇavamatābja-bhāskara 8)

*Śrī viṣṇor vaiṣṇavānāñca pāvanāṁ caraṇodakaṁ
sarva tīrtha mayāṁ pītvā kuryād ācamanāṁ na hi*

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"The water that has washed the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa or water that has washed the lotus feet of a pure Vaiṣṇava is equal to the combined waters of all the holy places of pilgrimage. After drinking a sip of such water, one does not need to take *āchamana* or wash one's hands and mouth." (Agastya Saṁhitā)

If a person, thinking that *charaṇāṁṛta* is insufficiently purifying, prefers to go to a place of pilgrimage for purification, it is likened to a person who gives up a valuable jewel in exchange for a lump of mud. One must understand the purity of *charaṇāṁṛta* by knowing the example of Lord Śiva who became purified by holding the water of the Ganges that had emanated from the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord. Therefore, taking *charaṇāṁṛta* is unlimitedly purifying. Furthermore, even if a person is sinful, but regularly drinks the medicine-like *charaṇāṁṛta* water that has washed the two lotus feet of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, that person surely becomes free from the disease of acquired sins. Such purified people constantly remember Lord Kṛṣṇa while sleeping, eating, sitting, standing, speaking, moving from place to place, and so on. Thus, they gradually develop real Vaiṣṇava qualities.

A HISTORY ABOUT CHARAÑĀMRTA

Sūta Goswāmī told Śaunaka Ṛṣi about what happened to a person who had drunk *charaṇāṁṛta* with faith. In Tretāyuga, there was a sinful Brāhmaṇa named Sudarśana. He would eat grains on Ekādaśi days, would criticize those who fasted on Ekādaśi days, would criticize the Vedic scriptures, and would only ponder on how to earn his livelihood so as to satisfy his family. One day he died, and the Yamadūtas came to take him to Yamaloka (hell). Seeing the Brāhmaṇa at his place, Lord

Yamarāja asked his secretary (Chitragupta) to narrate what kinds of sins and merits he had accumulated. Yamarāja said, "He appears to be grievously sinful." The secretary replied, "O Lord, he had not performed any meritorious activities, he solely accumulated sins. He even ate grains on Ekādaśī days. He even ate food on the appearance days of the Lord such as on the Janmāṣṭamī days. He is the lowest of all mankind because he ate on the birthday of Lord Kṛṣṇa; therefore he should be put in the ferocious hell for millions of years, and at last he should take a low birth."

Sūta Goswāmī continued, "Hearing this, the great messengers of Yamarāja took him to the most ferocious hell to suffer for the duration of one hundred Manus. (One day of Lord Brahmā, or 4,320,000,000 solar years, has 14 Manus.) After completing his term in hell, he was released and given birth as a pig in a village. Since he had previously eaten food on the Ekādaśīs and on the birthdays of Lord Kṛṣṇa, he was compelled to eat sufficient stool daily. After that life, he became a crow and ate everyone's mucus. But on one occasion, that crow came to the house of a devotee Brāhmaṇa where a pot of *charaṇāṁṛita* was left outside the door. He drank some of it and became free from remaining sins. After that day, he fell into a hunter's net and was killed and went to the abode of Lord Kṛṣṇa, being carried on a palanquin by two swan-like messengers of the Lord. This is the merit derived from drinking the water obtained from washing the lotus feet of the Lord if were installed properly."

VAIŚNAVAS ARE DETACHED

*kṛpāsyā dainyādi yuji prajāyate
yathā bhaved prema viśeṣa lakṣaṇam
bhaktir hy ananyādhipate mahātmanah*

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*sa cottama sādhana rūpikā'parā
na anya gati kṛṣṇa padāravindāt
samdṛṣyate brahma śivādi vanditāt
bhakticchayo pāta Śucintya vigrahā
davintya śakter avicintya śāsayaṭ*

"Those who are materially detached easily accept devotional service to gain the mercy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. By His mercy, they are able to manifest the symptoms of love of Godhead, specifically unalloyed devotional service. Anyone who executes unalloyed devotional service is described as the best because pure devotional service situates one on the transcendental platform. Such a person realizes fully that there is no other shelter besides the two lotus feet of the Supreme Lord, who is praised even by Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva with transcendental songs. The omnipotent Lord assumes various forms just to please His devotees, who aspire only to take shelter of His two lotus feet." (Vedānta-kāmadhenu)

A Vaiṣṇava always hankers for more mercy of the Lord. Because of being properly engaged in devotional service to the Supreme Lord, a devotee especially becomes qualified to receive the Lord's mercy. When that mercy comes, such as a flower garland worn by the Lord, the devotee respectfully accepts that remnant as the Lord's blessing. For example, it is stated in the Nārada Pañcharātra that a Vaiṣṇava, if he obtains a flower garland from the Lord's temple, respectfully accepts and wears it around the neck in a humble mood and with a bowed head. Afterwards, the garland should be put in the water or buried, but never thrown in a place where people can tread on it.

VAIŚNAVAS RESPECT EVERYONE

na nindet brahmaṇān devān viṣṇum brahmāṇam eva ca

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*rudram ādityam agnīm ca lokapālān grahāns tathā
vandet vaiṣṇavāṁ ca api puruṣāṁ pūrva dīkṣitam*

"A Vaiṣṇava pays heartfelt respects to, and does not criticize, the traditional Brāhmaṇas, the demigods, the Personality of Godhead Lord Viṣṇu, Lord Brahmā, Lord Siva, Sūrya, Agnī, the *lokapālas* (the presiding deities of the directions), the nine planets, and the Vaiṣṇavas who have already taken spiritual initiation from a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 2.221)

A real Vaiṣṇava, by nature, respects everyone, including all the demigods. The Nīti Vachana states that the demigods are in charge of the different departments of the Lord's creation: *daivādhīnarāṁ jagat sarvāṁ*. One of the main qualities of a Vaiṣṇava is humility. This humility can be realized by how honest a devotee is while respecting others. What to speak of respecting the demigods or the nine controlling planets, a Vaiṣṇava respects even an ant. A person is considered great only when that person realizes one's own insignificant position—not otherwise: *sapharī pharpharāyate* (Yajurveda).

PERFORMING ĀCHAMANA

*dhārayed vāsasī śuddhe paridhāna uttarīyake
anicchanna sudeśe śukle ācamet pīṭha samsthitāḥ*

"After wearing clean clothes, putting on a clean and untorn *chādar* (outer cover) over one's dress, which is pure and clean, one should sit on a seat and take *āchamana* to chant *japa*." (Aṅgirā Ṛṣi)

WEARING VAIŚNAVA TILAKA, AND ITS RESULTS

*tato dvādaśabhiḥ kuryān nāmabhiḥ keśavādibhiḥ
dvādaśa argeśu vidhivad ūrdhva puṇḍrāṇi vaiśṇavāḥ*

"The Supreme Lord says, 'Thereafter, using holy clay, a Vaiśnava should put upward-extending *tilaka* marks on the twelve assigned parts of the body while chanting the names of the Lord, ranging from *Om śrī keśavāya namah* till *Om śrī dāmodarāya namah*.' (Brahma Purāṇa)

It is confirmed in the statement of Sage Aṅgirā that a Vaiśnava should always take *āchamana* after applying *tilaka* marks. This sacred clay is obtained from the city of Dvārakā and is applied on one's body by saying, "*Om śrī keśavāya namah*," etc., starting from the forehead. The length of the *tilaka* on the forehead should be approximately six inches, but on the other parts of the body the *tilaka* mark should be equal to the length of an oil lamp's flame and should be drawn according to the individual's Vaiśnava tradition.

A further statement is found in the Padma Purāṇa, Kārtika Māhātmya, stating that a Vaiśnava should never wear *tripuṇḍra*, a *tilaka* that is applied as three horizontal lines on the forehead, but instead should put Vaiśnava *tilaka*, which extends upwards like a flame. If anyone wears *tripuṇḍra* (three horizontal lines on the forehead), that person cannot please Lord Śrī Hari with his service.

*ārabhya nāśikāmūlam lalāṭāntam likhen mṛḍam
nāśikāyas trayo bhāgā nāśā mūlam pracakṣate
samārabhya bhruvor mūlam antarālam prakalpayet*

"One should begin applying *tilaka* from the root of the

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nose to the top of the forehead where the hairline begins. The third portion of the nose is described as the root of the nose. From between the eyebrows to the top of the forehead (hairline), one should leave a clean space within the *tilaka* mark." (Padma Purāṇa, Uttarākhaṇḍa)

There is a complete chapter in the Padma Purāṇa, Uttarākhaṇḍa, regarding putting *tilaka* on one's body. The above verse describes that *tilaka* should be applied from the root of the nose to the top of the forehead. If one divides one's nose starting from between the eyebrows till the end of the nose into three parts, the second part from the end of the nose is called the root and *tilaka* should be applied from that place. The mark on the nose should be that of a *tulasi* leaf, and on the forehead it should be like a flute that is hollow on the inside. When the devotee applies *tilaka*, it signifies building temples on the body for the Lord to reside in. The great spiritual teachers have designated certain parts of the body for applying *tilaka* and the Spiritual Master teaches this.

Tilaka is called *svarūpa* in Sanskrit, which refers to the fact that these holy marks are on the original form of the soul. One should not use one's left hand unless it is necessary. A lot of sins become eradicated if one intensely craves to rapidly advance on the spiritual path. The secret to success for a Vaiṣṇava is to always think about how to follow more rules and spiritual instructions to become quickly purified to go back to Godhead.

*grahā na piḍanti na rākṣasāṁ gaṇāḥ
yakṣaḥ piśāca uragā bhūta dānavāḥ
lalāṭa paṭṭe khaga gopī candanāṁ
santiṣṭhate yasya hareḥ prasādataḥ*

Nārada Muni says, "O king of the birds, Garuḍa, if anyone's forehead is decorated with the *tilaka* mark of the

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gopīcandana (holy clay obtained from Dvārakā) that person obtains the mercy of the Supreme Lord and no planets (such as the sun, moon, mars, etc.), *yakṣas* (semi-demigods), *piśāchas* (ghosts and devils), snakes, or demons can harm that person.” (Garuḍa Purāṇa)

*sarpaṁ dṛṣṭvā yathā loke durdurā bhaya kampitā
ūrdhva puṇḍrāñkitam tad vat kampante yama kiñkarāḥ*

“As a frog becomes frightened and shakes by seeing a cobra, similarly the messengers of Yamarāja (death personified) shake with fear just by seeing a true devotee who wears an upward-extending *tilaka* mark” (Rāma-paddhatī)

According to the Skanda Purāṇa, Kāśi-khanḍa, after completing the worship of Tulasīdevī, to achieve her blessings, a Vaiṣṇava should place a small dot on the top of the forehead from her soil in which she is planted. It is understood that without her mercy one cannot achieve pure devotion to the Lord and the residence in Śrī Vṛindāban-dhāma.

*tulasī kāṣṭha mālāntu preta rājasya dūtakāḥ
dṛṣṭvā nasyanti dūreṇa vātoddhūtam yathā dalam
tulasī kāṣṭha mālābhīr bhūṣito bhramate yadi
duḥsvapnam durnimittañca na bhayaṁ śastrajam kvacit*

Mārkaṇḍeya Muni says, “If the messengers of Yamarāja, even from a distance, see a person wearing Tulasī neckbeads, they run away, just like a straw blown by the wind. Anyone wearing Tulasī neckbeads becomes free from all kinds of dangers, fear of weapons, and bad dreams.” (Garuḍa Purāṇa)

Since there is no longer room for sense gratification in the heart of a pure Vaiṣṇava, his heart is transformed into the abode of Lord Viṣṇu. His actions, environment, speech, and behavior are all completely spiritualized. Neither ghosts, nor

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demons, nor evil spirits can enter his residence.

Furthermore, a sincere devotee takes shelter of the Personality of Godhead, who wears a beautiful garland of Vṛiṇḍāban-grown *kadamba* flowers, who removes the sins of His surrendered devotees, who annihilates the demons, who attracts the eyes and hearts of devotees, and whose forehead is anointed with sandalwood paste mixed with musk. By rendering devotional service unto the Personality of Godhead, one is awarded liberation and the chance to live in His spiritual abode. Which person would give up such an opportunity of going back to Godhead and desire to merge into Him instead, or enjoy the material comforts of the heavenly planets? A faithful devotee prays to the Lord, "O Lord, I do not want liberation if it destroys my devotional service and makes me forget that I am Your servant."

*yad kaṇṭhe tulasi nāsti te narāḥ mūla mānavāḥ
annam viṣṭāṁ jalāṁ mūtrāṁ pāyaśāṁ rudhirāṁ bhavet*

"Anyone who does not wear Tulasī neckbeads on the neck is the lowest of all mankind. For such a person, the result of all foods is like eating stool; the result of water is like drinking urine; and *pāyaśāṁ* (sweet-rice made from milk) consumed becomes like blood." (Nīti Śāstra)

A Vaiṣṇava, due to intense desire for rapid purification, always has spiritual marks on the body. A Vaiṣṇava is always alert to avoid deviating from the strict path of devotional service, because of fear of losing spiritual advancement. If by chance *tulasī* neckbeads are broken or if *tilaka* has become worn off, a Vaiṣṇava will not eat or drink anything until such items are corrected. A Vaiṣṇava understands that eating and drinking are not for sense gratification but just to rejuvenate oneself in order to please Lord Kṛṣṇa. When there is no more room for sense gratification in a Vaiṣṇava, then that heart becomes transformed

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into the abode of Lord Viṣṇu. All of the actions, speech, and everything around that Vaiṣṇava devotee become completely spiritual, and thus that devotee cannot be disturbed by ghosts, demons, or evil spirits.

*tulasī mūla mṛdbhiś ca tilakāni nayanti ye
tulasī kāṣṭha parikaiś ca jīneyas te vaiṣṇavā janāḥ*

"Those who make their *tilaka* marks on the forehead using mud obtained from the place where Tulasī is planted or use Tulasī wood paste to wear *tilaka* are also known to be Vaiṣṇavas." (Padma Purāṇa, Kriyāyogaśāra)

A Vaiṣṇava truly understands the importance of Tulasī. Her wood, her leaves, flowers, seeds, and the soil in which she is planted, are all pure. A devotee daily worships Tulasī and puts a dot inside the *tilaka* using her soil to achieve her mercy for further advancement. *rādhā-kṛṣṇa-sevā pāvo ei abhilāṣī*. Lord Kṛṣṇa emphatically says, "Whether one is sinful or pious, if one worships Me with Tulasī leaves, I, the Personality of Godhead, repeatedly say that that person will never suffer in hell."

Lord Kṛṣṇa always resides near an advanced devotee and He says to His main queen, Satyabhāmā, in the Dvārakā-māhātmya—and this is also spoken by Nārada Muni to King Pṛthu in the Padma Purāṇa—that the Supreme Lord neither lives in the spiritual world, nor in the hearts of Yogīs, nor anywhere else where the sun shines; He only resides in the place where His devotees chant His glories. Therefore association of a truly advanced devotee is essential for one's spiritual advancement.

A VAIŚNAVA'S FUNCTIONS

*garuḍam dakṣine kṛtvā kuryāt tat prṣṭhato budhaḥ
avaśyam ca praṇāmas trin śaktāśced adhikādhikān*

"While paying obeisances to the Lord, a Vaiṣṇava who is aware of Vedic rules keeps Garuḍa on the right side and keeps the Lord on the left side. Paying obeisances too close to the Lord is forbidden. A Vaiṣṇava must pay obeisances a minimum of three times in a day, and if possible a Vaiṣṇava should pay obeisances more times than that." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī states, "Garuḍa stays in front of the Lord in the temple, and when one pays obeisances to the Lord, one should have Garuḍa on the right side and the Lord's deity on the left and then pay obeisances. In other words, one's left side should be seen by the Deities. When one pays three obeisances, they are meant as one for the front, one for the back, and one for the right side of the Deity, but one cannot pay obeisances too close to the Lord, such as inside the Deity room. Paying of obeisances should be outside of the door frame of the sanctum sanctorum. Paying of obeisances a minimum of three times indicates one's obtaining an inconceivable amount of merit. Just as scriptures forbid one to circumambulate in front of the Deity or to circumambulate the temple only once, but states to circumambulate three times at least, similarly one should pay obeisances at least three times. If one has the ability, stamina, and time, then one should pay obeisances to the Lord and circumambulate the temple—six times, forty-eight times, or one hundred and eight times." (Dīgdarśinī-tīkā)

The Varāha Purāṇa states that a person becomes free from the fear of Yamarāja just by circumambulating and paying obeisances to the Lord. This act develops devotion in the heart for the Lord. When one becomes purified, that person naturally prays and chants constantly for the Lord's pleasure, thus ultimately ensuring reaching the spiritual world. In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, a devotee expresses sincere devotional feelings to the Lord, saying, "O Lord, O infallible Personality of Godhead, in whatever species of life I may take my next births, please let me remain fixed in uninterrupted devotion to You. As a sense

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gratifying person has an unlimited attachment to the objects of sense gratification, please let me have a similar intense attachment within my heart to Your devotional service."

PERFORMING DEVOTIONAL SERVICE LIFE AFTER LIFE

As per the Nārāyaṇa-vyūha a pure devotee reveals his heart's feelings thus, "O Lord, I do not desire even the post of Lord Brahmā if it is bereft of Your pure devotional service. If I can engage in devotional service birth after birth, I do not mind even taking birth in lower species." Without the opportunity for devotional service to the Lord a Vaiṣṇava feels as if the body of ocean water is equal to a palmful of water; the bright sun is like just a glow worm; a mountain of gold seems equal to a lump of mud; a king is as if he is a beggar; the touchstone is like an ordinary stone; and the desire fulfilling tree (kalpavṛkṣa) is like an ordinary piece of wood. What's more, a sincere devotee thinks his very body to be a burden. Having this mood a devotee prays, "O Lord Harī, I'm drowning in the ocean of lust; therefore please save me from this dangerous struggle for material existence. This ocean of material existence is full of infamy and is very difficult to overcome. O Madhusūdana, please be merciful unto me and, as the boatman of my intelligence, give me realized knowledge and deliver me from this material world."

LIBERATING ASSOCIATION

*vināśayati apayaśo buddhim viśādayaty api
pratiṣṭhā pāyati prāyo ṣrṅāṁ vaiṣṇava darśanam*

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"One's infamy becomes destroyed just by looking at a pure Vaiṣṇava, and association with him purifies one's existence. It expands one's spiritual intelligence and increases one's prestige." (Padma Purāṇa)

An extremely advanced devotee never considers himself to be great but, rather, feels like he is the most insignificant and thus desires good association. Such humble feelings are expressed from the heart by a real devotee. In the Padma Purāṇa such a pure devotee prays, "O killer of the Madhū demon, day and night I am accumulating offenses at Your lotus feet. Please forgive me and consider me to be Your menial servant. O Govinda, it is Your promise that 'My devotee never perishes,' and because of this promise, I am still surviving." A pure devotee is truly advanced in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and does not manifest his spiritual potency, even though he has attained perfection.

*ye viṣṇu-pūjana ratā harī bhakta bhaktā
ekādaśī vrataratāḥ kapaṭair vihīnāḥ
ye viṣṇu pāda śalilām śirasā vahanti
te pāpino'pi na bhaṭā mama daṇḍaniyāḥ*

Lord Yamarāja says to his messengers, "Anyone who worships Lord Kṛṣṇa with full faith, is an initiated devotee of a pure devotee, fasts on the Ekādaśī days, is not a hypocrite, who drinks the water that has washed the lotus feet of the Lord and after drinking touches that hand to their head, even if that devotee is of sinful background, is not meant to be punished by me." (Kriyā-yoga-sāra 15.80)

VAIŚNAVAS DON'T USE ANYTHING UNOFFERED TO THE LORD

vaiṣṇavānāṁ hi bhoktavyāṁ prārthyannāṁ vaiṣṇava sadā

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avaiśnavānām annam tu parivarjyam amedhya vat

"A Vaiṣṇava should ask for food only from another Vaiṣṇava. Even if a person is a Brāhmaṇa but is not a Vaiṣṇava, his food should not be accepted, one should think it to be inedible for a Vaiṣṇava." (Kūrma Purāṇa)

If a Brāhmaṇa is not a Vaiṣṇava, his food should be considered equal to that of a Śūdra's food and should not be accepted free (in charity) by a Vaiṣṇava. The scriptural evidence is quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī in the Digdarśinī-tīkā thus, "Vaiṣṇava's possessions are always glorified, whereas the food of a Brāhmaṇa who is not a Vaiṣṇava should be rejected by the Vaiṣṇavas. Therefore, one who is alert to avoid edibles and the association of non-Vaiṣṇavas is considered to be a serious Vaiṣṇava." This eating restriction applies to every devotee except to a perfectly self-realized soul because Lord Kṛṣṇa resides within his heart in His active form. Still, there are certain ingredients that a Vaiṣṇava can purchase even from a Śūdra. This is explained in the same Digdarśinī-tīkā, "The learned Vaiṣṇavas, after paying a small price, can purchase sweets, ghee, deep-fried foods, milk, *shaktu* (roasted flour), oil-cakes, and oil even from a Śūdra."

Prahlāda Mahārāja states that a Vaiṣṇava is very careful in protecting their devotional creeper, they do not even eat any grains from the house of a person who does not worship the Deity of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa instructs the devotees that everything, including leaves, flowers, fruits, water, new clothes, food grains, drinks, or medicines, should be first offered to the Supreme Lord before use so purity in the heart remains intact and the Lord showers mercy upon that devotee. Without the mercy of the Lord, nothing good can happen to anyone. Lord Dhanvantarī (the medical incarnation of God) says:

acyuta ananta govinda nāma uccāraṇa bheṣajāt

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naśyanti śakalān rogān satyarām satyarām badāmy aham

"If any physician who prescribes the medicines and any patient who, while consuming the medicines chants the names of the Supreme Lord, saying, 'O Achyuta, O Ananta, O Govinda,' I repeatedly declare it that their consuming of medicines will surely bring the desired effects." (Mādhava-nidāna)

Therefore, anyone who uses something for the first time without first offering it to the Lord, must undergo the atonement of fasting for a day. As it is found in Viṣṇu Smṛuti, in a conversation between Gautama Ṛṣi and Ambariṣa Mahārāja, "A Vaiṣṇava should always first offer clothes, fruits, food, and juices to the Supreme Lord before using them."

THE DIRECTIONS FACED WHILE EATING YEILD DIFFERENT RESULTS

*āyusyām prāṇmukho bhurikte yaśasyām dakṣiṇamukhaḥ
śrīyām pratyāṇmukho bhurikte ḫtam bhurikte udarimukhaḥ*

"While consuming edibles, if one faces East one's intelligence increases, if one faces South one's fame increases, by facing West riches increase, and by facing North one achieves the topmost benefit, liberation." (Kurma Purāṇa)

The Skanda Purāṇa, in a conversation between Lord Brahmā and Nārada Muni, describes how devotees become liberated. One who always thinks about the Supreme Lord, who chants His holy names, whose stomach contains *prasādam* (food that has been offered to Lord Kṛṣṇa), whose head has been touched by *charaṇāṁṛita* (water that washed the Lord's lotus feet), and whose body has been decorated with garlands first

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offered to Lord Harī—such a person has become purified equal to infallible residents of the spiritual world.

RARENESS OF A DEVOTEE

Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "Even if one is a very learned scholar of Sanskrit literature, but is not a devotee and does not engage in My devotional service, he is not accepted as pure. But if someone is a sincere devotee but is born in the family of a dog-eater, that devotee is dear to Me. Such a devotee should be respected and should be given gifts, and one should take gifts from him, for such a sincere devotee is as respectable as I am."

If a Brāhmaṇa has all twelve of the Brahminical qualifications (as they are stated in the book called *Sanat-sujātā*) but is not a devotee and is averse to the lotus feet of the Lord, he is certainly lower than a sincere devotee who is from a dog-eater family because such a devotee has sincerely dedicated everything—mind, words, activities, wealth, and life—to please the Supreme Lord. Such a devotee is better than such a learned Brāhmaṇa because the sincere devotee can purify his whole family, whereas the Brāhmaṇa who is not a Vaiṣṇava is in a position of false prestige and cannot purify even himself.

*ye viṣṇu niratāḥ śāntāḥ lokānugraha tat parāḥ
sarva bhūta dayā yukta viṣṇu rūpaḥ prakīrtitāḥ*

Śrī Sūta Goswāmī said, "Any person who is very attached to Lord Śrī Viṣṇu, and who is very peaceful, kind, and merciful to all living entities, is equal to Lord Śrī Harī." (Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa)

In the material world there are innumerable living entities. Among these living entities, very few are human beings,

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and among them, few are interested in following spiritual life properly. Out of many people who follow spiritual life, only some receive liberation from this material world because giving up material attachment to society, friendship, love, country, home, wife, and children is very difficult. Among many millions who are liberated from worldly life and situated in knowledge, one may be a true devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Such devotees are extremely rare. A person who executes his prescribed duties properly for one hundred births becomes qualified to occupy the post of Lord Brahmā, and if he becomes more qualified than Lord Brahmā, he approaches Lord Śiva. But one who is directly surrendered to Lord Kṛṣṇa through unalloyed devotional service is immediately promoted to the spiritual planets, whereas Lord Śiva and Lord Brahmā reach there only after the destruction of the material world.

Devotees engage in devotional service in every condition of life, without any fear. They make no differentiation between the heavens, liberation, and the hellish planets because such devotees are only interested to satisfy the Supreme Lord. This is the reason that the Supreme Lord remains completely under the control of such devotees. He says, "Indeed, I am not at all independent. I depend on My true devotees." Such devotees only want to please Lord Kṛṣṇa and are completely devoid of material desires. That is why Lord Kṛṣṇa sits within the core of their hearts.

Although the Supreme Personality of Godhead is self-sufficient, He becomes dependent on His pure devotees. He loves His loyal devotees so much that He does not even care about His wife, the Goddess of Fortune. Such is the love and greatness of the Lord. Therefore, who is that sane person who will not worship the Personality of Godhead? Yamarāja has instructed his messengers to leave aside such faithful devotees of the Lord because they are protected by the club of the Lord. Even if an unalloyed devotee accidentally engages in sinful

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activities, he is not considered sinful because Lord Kṛṣṇa remains at his side. Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the Bhagavad Gītā that the devotee's constant engagement in devotional service is the reason for this. Due to strict abstinence from further sinning, such a devotee immediately becomes purified. (See Bhagavad Gītā, The Song of God, 9.30, 31) For this reason, the Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa and Padma Purāṇa state that Yamarāja does not take charge of such a devotee. Therefore, it is very rare even to become the devotee of a qualified devotee, because this path for liberation is unusual and uncommon.

RESULTS OF VAIŚNAVA ASSOCIATION

*asāgarottham piyūṣam adravyam vyasan auṣadham
harṣaś cāloka paryantaḥ satāṁ kila samāgamaḥ*

"The association of devotees is a type of nectar that has not come out from the Milk Ocean. This association is easily available to those who are very fortunate. Saintly association is the medicine to cure material contaminations and is the only means for everyone to obtain transcendental pleasure." (Padma Purāṇa)

Previously, the demigods obtained nectar by laboriously churning the Milk Ocean, but along with the nectar, they extracted a deadly poison. Unlike the nectar born from the Milk Ocean, the association of a pure devotee is all-pleasurable and has the medicinal effect of purifying one's material contamination. It is generally said that "happiness awaits misery," but unlike the ocean of material existence that always ends in misery, the association of a real devotee always ends in happiness. By associating with a real devotee, one becomes a devotee and ultimately goes back to Godhead to obtain eternal

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happiness. Therefore, the nectar of the association of devotees is superior to the nectar derived from churning the Milk Ocean. The medicinal effect of saintly association is superior to ordinary medicine, because ordinary medicine is gross and can therefore cure only the gross bodily ailments. But, even association with a pure devotee for a short time awards liberation, which is the topmost perfection of life. *Lava mātra sādhu saṅge sarva siddhi hoyā.*

Sanat Kumāra speaks to Nārada Muni in the Brhannāradīya Purāṇa, saying that any person who is interested in devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa should understand that the only solace in this world of suffering is to associate with a pure devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Even a moment's association with a pure devotee can award all success. This is also stated by Śaunaka Ṛṣi while questioning Śrīla Śūta Goswāmī about the importance of associating with a pure devotee. When Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu met Śrī Sanātana Goswāmī, He embraced him and cried aloud that by touching, seeing, and glorifying the qualities of a pure Vaiṣṇava, one perfects one's existence. Mother Earth says to Prahlāda Mahārāja:

*akṣṇoh phalam tvādr̥ṣa-darśanam hi
tanoḥ phalam tvādr̥ṣa-gātra-saṅgah
jihvā-phalam tvādr̥ṣa-kīrtanam hi
sudurlabhbhā bhāgavatā hi loke*

“My dear Vaiṣṇava, seeing a pure devotee like you is the perfection of one's eyesight; associating with a pure devotee like you is the perfection of having a material body; and glorifying a pure devotee like you is the tongue's real purpose, for in the material world it is very difficult to find a pure devotee of the Lord.” (Hari-bhakti-śuddhodaya 13-2)

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In an assembly of real devotees, there is no question of discussing material subjects like politics and sociology. In an assembly of pure devotees, there is discussion only of the qualities, forms, and pastimes of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. A pure devotee understands that indeed there is no better meditation than the worship of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. There is no better result than that obtained by worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead. There is no better renunciation than worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead. There is no greater meritorious deed than worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead. There is no ultimate destination other than worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead. That is why association of a pure devotee should be hankered for in one's life.

POTENCY OF A VAIŚNAVA

*śrī kṛṣṇa bhaktyāśaktyā tu sandhyopāṣyādikam yadi
patet karma na pātityadosāśankā kathañcana*

"If, due to one's mind being too absorbed in Lord Kṛṣṇa's devotional service, one forgets to chant the promised Gāyatrī mantra, it does not diminish the devotee's spiritual advancement because the Lord forgives such a rare occasion. That is why a devotee is not considered to be fallen." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 11.7)

A twice-born Vaiṣṇava, who has been awarded the Gāyatrī mantra, is certainly obligated to chant it three times daily. Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī comments: "Certainly one has to chant one's Gāyatrī mantras to worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead. If one forgets to chant it, then how can one worship the Supreme Lord, since without chanting the Gāyatrī mantra one cannot perform any spiritual functions? In answer to

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this it is here written 'kr̄ṣṇa bhaktyāśaktyā,' which means that if someone is so absorbed in and is enthusiastically performing devotional service to Lord Kr̄ṣṇa, this absorption nullifies all sins, including the sin of accidentally failing to chant the prescribed Gāyatrī mantras." (Digdarśinī-tīkā)

In the Padma Purāṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead confirms this statement, saying that if a devotee is seriously engaged in His devotional service and somehow forgets to chant the Gāyatrī mantras, then thirty-three million demigods and sages do that service for that devotee. In this there is no doubt. Still, one should not take advantage of this facility and knowingly neglect the chanting of one's prescribed Gāyatrī daily. It is therefore recommended that one associates with a bona-fide devotee to learn proper spiritual etiquette.

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī states about real devotees, "One who knows specifically how to serve the Supreme Personality of Godhead must certainly respectfully instruct other Vaiṣṇavas about it. Glorifying the Supreme Personality of Godhead to others is not equal to describing ordinary religious topics to them." (Digdarśinī-tīkā) Those who hear the transcendental glories of the Supreme Lord from other Vaiṣṇavas and repeat them to others will surely enjoy happiness, even while in this world, because the Lord never leaves such persons. Vaiṣṇavas have no interest in reaching heaven or even the topmost planet, like Brahmaloka, if there is no Kr̄ṣṇa consciousness there. Such devotees enjoy teaching Kr̄ṣṇa consciousness to others.

STRICTNESS OF A VAIŚNAVA

*ekādaśyāṁ na ca aśnīyāt pakṣayor ubhayor api
jāgarāṁ niśi kurvīta viśeṣārcayed vibhum*

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"One should not eat anything on the Ekādaśīs of either fortnights. If possible, remaining awake overnight, one should specifically worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead and chant His holy names." (Nārada Pañcharātra)

*itthāṁ śāstra vicārena śiṣṭācārānusārataḥ
ekādaśī vyavastheyam kṛta vaiśnava sammatā
vidvānso'py atra mūḍhaḥ syur vinā kṛṣṇa prasādataḥ
ataḥ sadāsau nirdhārya prīṣṭvā bhāgavatottamān*

"Ekādaśī is very dear to the Vaiśnavas. One can determine the actual day for fasting by studying the scriptural rules and by accepting the advice of self-realized souls. Unless one has the direct mercy of the Supreme Lord, even if one is very learned it is very difficult to determine the exact days of Ekādaśī. Therefore, to perform the Ekādaśī fast on the proper day, one should always learn from the topmost Vaiśnava devotee." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 12.410, 411)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī explains: "Those who are not Vaiśnavas determine their Ekādaśī dates just on the basis of astrological calculation, whereas the Vaiśnavas determine their Ekādaśī dates by using astrological calculation along with the revealed scriptures and the advice of a greatly learned pure devotee. Vaiśnavas understand that it is very difficult to properly determine a Vaiśnava Ekādaśī date, which is not the same as an Ekādaśī that is mixed with the Daśamī (previous) day. Ekādaśī mixed with Daśamī should be carefully avoided even if that Ekādaśī day is mixed with Dvādaśī (a day after the Ekādaśī day). One should fast on the Triśparśā Ekādaśī (mixed with Ekādaśī, Dvādaśī and Trayodaśī days) which is free from Daśamī. It usually falls during one of the dark fortnights of *chāturmāṣya* (the four months of the rainy season). Essentially, a learned pure Vaiśnava should always be consulted to determine on which days to fast. Due to the illusory influence of Śukrāchārya,

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even learned scholars expert in astrology and Vedic literatures sometimes become bewildered and remain incapable of determining the exact date for fasting on Ekādaśī. Therefore, one should consult a pure devotee who depends upon the mercy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead—this is the perfect way to determine the exact day of the Ekādaśī fast.” (Digdarśinī-tikā)

*mṛduka uṣṇa supakvañca kuryād vai laghu bhojanam
na indriyāñām yathā vṛddhis tathā bhuñjīta sādhakah*

“One who is endeavoring to obtain liberation should only eat a small amount of sweets, steaming-hot foods and deep-fried preparations, and those foods that would agitate the senses to divert one from the spiritual path.” (Nārada Pañcharātra)

Whoever wants to worship or meditate on the Supreme Lord, who alone is the fruit of intensive scriptural studies and rewards one with liberation, must carefully follow the diet system presented here. Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmi also quotes a verse from Śaradatīlaka saying, “Those who claim to be devotees should eat in the mornings and in the afternoons and their meal should consist of varieties of vegetables, fruits, roots, milk products, nuts, and grains.” (Digdarśinī-tikā). One should pray to the Supreme Lord for help to remain situated in goodness so that the Vedic literatures and the Supreme Lord can be properly understood.

Lust is like nectar in the beginning but poison in the end. It drives one to the house of Yamarāja (hell), and makes one forget the gate of liberation. A Vaiṣṇava is very careful to protect the creeper of devotional service. A real devotee knows that lustfully looking at, touching, speaking with, or playing with women should always be avoided. A devotee should also know that just as through a single hole in a water pot all water leaks out, similarly, if a single sense remains attached to sense

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gratification, one's real intelligence gradually becomes lost. But if a person controls the senses through the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, by associating with true devotees and keeping the Lord's two lotus feet in the heart, then success in devotional life is reached, and thus the parents become glorious for having given birth to a devotee.

VAIŚNAVAS CAREFULLY CHANT JAPA

*yastu bhagavato bhūtvā na gr̄hnāti ganitrikāṁ
āsuri tasya dīkṣā tu na sa dharmāya vidyate
ganitrikāṁ gr̄hitvā yo mantram cintayet budhāḥ
janmāntara sahaśrāṇi cintito'hañca tena vai*

"For one who accepts spiritual life or engages in devotional service to the Supreme Lord but does not accept a *japa-mālā* for chanting the Lord's names, their spiritual initiation is considered to be of a demoniac style. This kind of spiritual initiation is not very beneficial for emancipation. Therefore, those who are intelligent and thoughtful should accept *japa-mālā* while taking spiritual initiation. If one chants on authorized Japa beads properly, I, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, remember that devotee for thousands of their births and reward perfection." (Varāha Purāṇa)

A PURE VAIŚNAVA IS NATURALLY QUALIFIED TO ESTABLISH THE DEITY

*yasya viṣṇau parā bhaktir yathā viṣṇou tathā gurau
sa eva sthāpako jñeyah satyam etad vadāmi te*

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“Any devotee who has genuinely developed unalloyed devotion equally for both the Supreme Lord and the Spiritual Master, I truthfully say that such a pure devotee can establish the deities of the Supreme Lord.” (Hayaśīrṣa-pañcharātra)

A PURE VAISNAVA REALIZES KRŚNA IN HIS HEART

api ca samrādhane pratyakṣa anumānābhyaṁ

“Even though the Supreme Lord always remains unseen to the eyes He still, by execution of devotional service, personally appears before His devotee, and this is confirmed by all the revealed scriptures.” (Vedānta Sūtra)

Beyond the covering of this universe is the spiritual world where the Supreme Lord resides. That place is completely pure, eternal, and always effulgent and that place is called the transcendental Brahman and is free from illusion, arrogance, and duality. The devotees who are free from illusion, false ego, and arrogance, who have controlled senses, and who constantly meditate on the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord and worship Him with devotion are allowed entrance there.

THE GOAL SHOULD BE TO BE KRŚNA CONSCIOUS

*sarva vedān sa itihāsān sapurāṇān sayuktikān
sa pañcarātrān vijñāha viṣṇur jīvye na ca anyathā*

“If one studies all the *Vedas*, histories, *Purāṇas*, *Upaniṣads*, and other Vedic scriptures, like the Nārada Pañcharātra, the conclusion would be that no one other than the

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Supreme Lord Viṣṇu (a name of Lord Kṛṣṇa) is to be known in one's life." (Brahma-tarka)

*muṇḍi śikhīthavā bhavet tridaṇḍi niṣparigraha
kāṣāyavāsaḥ satataṁ dhyāna yoga parāyaṇaḥ*

"Whether one has a shaven head, long hair, or is completely renounced as a Tridaṇḍi-Sanyāsī wearing saffron, he should always meditate on the Supreme Personality of Godhead." (Svarga-khaṇḍa 59.15)

Śrīpāda Śaṅkarāchārya told his disciples to surrender to Lord Śrī Govinda by saying, "Whether one has matted hair or a shaven head, whether he is wearing saffron and carrying a water pot or wears no clothes at all, one just needs to surrender and chant the names of the Supreme Lord, Śrī Govinda (the favorite name of Lord Kṛṣṇa)." *Jatilo munḍi luñthit keśah*, (Mohamudgara-stotra, Bhaja-govindam prayer). No matter which spiritual process one follows, one must serve the Supreme Lord with devotion, otherwise one cannot reach Vaikunṭha, the spiritual world. The symptom of a serious devotee is that the devotee feels pain by seeing others who do not take up Kṛṣṇa consciousness. For a pure devotee, external suffering is not real pain, because he has completely realized that he is not his body.

VAIŚNAVA ETIQUETTE REGARDING PAYING OBEISANCES

*tathā snānam prakurvantaṁ samit puṣpa haram tathā
udapātra dharañcaiva bhuñjantam nābhivādayet*

"When a Vaiṣṇava is bathing, collecting wood for a sacrifice, picking flowers, carrying water, or honoring *prasādam*, one should not pay obeisances to him." (Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa)

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*sadbhiḥ sahaś ca kartavyaḥ satraṁ saṅgo hi bheṣajam
satra saṅgaś ca vivekaś ca niścalam nayanādvayam*

“One must associate with a saintly person because his prescription-like association purifies one’s intelligence and also awards spiritual vision.” (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 1)

For persons who study Vedic literatures in the association of devotees, ignorance and laziness become dissipated. The association of devotees helps one realize the essence of the Vedic literatures, by which one attains self-realization in due course. On the other hand, persons who study the Vedic literatures outside the association of devotees are just like blind men who cannot read.

Therefore, one should be determined to wholeheartedly practice devotional service in proper spiritual association, using one’s body, words, and mind, and never stop under any circumstances. Even if one’s relatives criticize, one’s spouse divorces, one’s children leave, the public laughs to taunt one, or the government punishes one, still one should be determined to remain a devotee in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Only a determined devotee achieves success in all circumstances. A devotee should relinquish reading all literatures written by materialistic people, just as one gives up milk that is touched by the lips of a dog.

dhārayet sarva varṇānāṁ hari sālokya siddhaye

“To attain the spiritual world, one should accept the path of Vaiṣṇavism. It is meant for all classes of people (*varṇas*).” (Vāyu Purāṇa)

THE EXALTED POSITION OF THE VAIŚNAVA

vaiṣṇavo yad gṛhe bhūnkte yeśāṁ vaiṣṇava saṅgatī

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te'pi vaḥ pariḥārye ṣyuh te naro hata kilviṣah

Lord Yamarāja tells his messengers, "Do not arrest that person in whose house a pure Vaiṣṇava eats and who associates with a Vaiṣṇava. Such people are not meant to be brought here because they have become free from sins." (Padma Purāṇa)

*viṣṇu bhaktasya ye dāsā vaiṣṇavānna bhujaś ca ye
te'pi kṛtu bhujāṁ vaiśya gatim yāti nirākulā*

"If any devotee of Lord Viṣṇu's devotee offers a Vaiṣṇava something to eat and then eats his remnants, that devotee achieves the results of performing a horse sacrifice and, ultimately obtains liberation." (Padma Purāṇa)

*vaiṣṇavo viṣṇuvat pūjyā mama mānya viśeṣayaḥ
teṣāṁ kṛte'vamāne tu vināśo jāyate dhruvam*

Lord Śiva says to Pārvatī, "A true Vaiṣṇava, whom even I worship, should be worshiped as much as Lord Viṣṇu. Anybody who disrespects a pure devotee will surely be destroyed." (Padma Purāṇa, Pātāla khaṇḍa)

*vaiṣṇavān janamālokya na abhyutthānam karoti yaḥ
na praṇayed aparato vipra sa naro narakātithi*

"Anyone who does not rise upon seeing a Vaiṣṇava arrive to show him respects and pay obeisances, that person belongs to hell." (Padma Purāṇa, Pātāla-khaṇḍa)

RARENESS OF VAIŚNAVA QUALITIES

kṛṣṇa bhakti rasa bhāvitā matiḥ

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*kriyatāṁ yadi kuto'pi labhyate
tatra laulyam api mūlyam ekalam
janma kōti-sukrtair na labhyate*

"Even after hundreds and thousands of lives of pious activities, one cannot attain pure devotional service. One can achieve it only by paying the cost of intense greed for devotional service. If it is available somewhere, one must even purchase it without delay." (Padyāvalī)

Those who are unalloyed devotees have purchased the Supreme Lord with their undivided devotional service. By nature, the Lord is self-satisfied and does not require anything from anyone, still He cares for their devotion. He is not concerned with how much they give for Him but cares how much they keep for themselves. Due to complete surrender and intense greed to serve Lord Kṛṣṇa, a Vaiṣṇava is not considered to be an ordinary person. In the Padma Purāṇa, the Lord says *aham ca vaiṣṇava ādhīnaś*, "I am under the control of a real Vaiṣṇava."

One of the twenty-six qualities of a Vaiṣṇava is that a Vaiṣṇava is always meek and humble. This means a Vaiṣṇava would rather take care of the Lord than disturb the Lord by asking the Lord to care for them. In this connection, Śrī Rūpa Goswāmī quotes a history of how once, when baby Kṛṣṇa was sound asleep, Mother Yaśodā heard Him say, "O Śiva, you are welcome. Sit on My right side. O Brahmā, you are welcome. Sit on My left side. O Indra, are you happy? O Kubera, I have not seen you for a long time." Hearing these words, Mother Yaśodā became frightened and thought, "Oh, why does my baby speak in this undesirable way? If he keeps on speaking like this, His ears will fall off! Oh, some evil spirits must have taken over my little baby!" With this in mind, she chanted some mantras for His protection. Although Lord Kṛṣṇa is maintaining and protecting innumerable universes, Mother Yaśodā is thinking that baby Kṛṣṇa is under her protection. Just see the pure devotion of a

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real devotee! This is the actual attitude of a devotee in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. That is why one should always be ready to pay homage to a pure devotee of this tradition.

*prahlāda-nārada-parāśara-puṇḍarīka-
vyāsa-ambarīṣa-Śuka-śaunaka-bhīṣma-dālbhyān
rukmaṇīgada uddhava-vibhīṣaṇa-phalgunañādīn
puṇyāni imān parama bhāgavatān namāmi*

"I pay my humble obeisances to great Vaiṣṇavas like Prahlāda, Nārada, Parāśara, Puṇḍarīka, Vyāsa, Ambarīṣa, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, Śaunaka Ṛṣi, Bhīṣmadeva, Dālbhya Ṛṣi, Rukmāṇīgada, Uddhava, Vibhīṣaṇa, Arjuna, and many other similar Vaiṣṇavas." (Padyavalī)

These Vaiṣṇavas always depended on Lord Kṛṣṇa's mercy. Their prayers and services brought Kṛṣṇa face to face to be with them. Although there are nine kinds of devotional services to please Him, still, devotional service is so potent that any one of the varieties of devotional service, if properly executed, can reward the perfection of life—liberation. For example, Parīkṣit Mahārāja achieved liberation just by hearing the glories of the Lord; Śukadeva Goswāmī just by speaking them; Prahlāda, by remembering the Lord; Goddess Lakṣmīdevī, by serving the Lord's lotus feet; and Prīthu Mahārāja, by worshiping the Lord. Akrūra achieved liberation by offering prayers to the Lord; Hanumān, by serving the Lord; Arjuna, by becoming a friend of the Lord; and by complete renunciation, Bali Mahārāja achieved liberation. Each of these personalities, by executing only a single type of devotional service, achieved the topmost liberation. That is why a devotee only wants to please the Lord and does not care about liberation.

THE VAIŚNAVA'S PERFECTION

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All of the activities of a real devotee are meant to please the Lord and no one else. One of our Spiritual Masters from our unbroken chain of disciplic succession, Śrīla Mādhavendra Purīpāda, humbly prayed in the following way:

*ayi dīna dayārdranātha he mathurā nātha
kadā avalokyase kṛdayāṁ tvad āloka kātaram
dayita bhrāmyati kim karomy aham.*

"O my Lord, You are, by nature, very merciful to the miserable. O Lord of Mathurā, I am the most miserable and an orphan in the creation. O Lord, when will I see You? O merciful one, I am hankering to see You, but being unable to, my heart is tormented. How can I rectify this situation?"

*yāra nahinī vraja rāja kumār so
pyāra nahinī vrajavāsin kau sau
heta nahinī hari bhakti barobar
heta nahinī vraja maṇḍala jaisau
nāma rāṭaiṇi jahāṇi rādhikā krṣṇa
nirmala jala yamunā jala kausau
nāma nahinī manamohana kau sau
gāma nahinī nandagāma hai jaisau*

"There is no better friend than the Supreme Lord Śrī Krṣṇa, the son of the king of Vraja. There is no better affection than the affection extended by the Vrajavāsis, the residents of the Vraja area. There is no better shelter than devotional service to Lord Śrī Krṣṇa. There is no better residence than the Vraja area, where everyone chants the names of Rādhā and Krṣṇa. There is no better water than the water of the Yamunā River. There is no better name than the name of Lord Krṣṇa, who attracts everyone's mind. There is no better place to live in this

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world than living in Nandagrām, the capital village of Nanda Mahārāja." (Poet Rasakhāna)

Service rendered to the Supreme Personality of Godhead is called devotional service, and it results in liberation. Therefore, what foolish person would give up devotional service to the Supreme Lord and seek to merge into Him? A Vaiṣṇava is one hundred percent dedicated to serving Lord Kṛṣṇa. He says, "Let the rich people call me mad and the intellectuals call me arrogant, but I will never stop hankering to worship the lotus feet of the Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Govinda. O Supreme Personality of Godhead, whether You make me the king of the whole earth or the poorest of all, whether You daily reward me good respect or offer me unlimited insults, whether You give me residence in Vaikuṇṭha or send me to hell, still, O son of Vasudeva, I desire to never be separated from Your devotional service."

How can anyone claim to be pious without worshiping Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa? How can one be sinful if he is worshiping Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa? A sincere devotee prays to the Lord, "Just as a lusty person is hankering for the opposite gender, a greedy person is hankering for wealth, and a hungry person is hankering for food, let my mind similarly hanker for and be attached to Your devotional service."

THE VAIŚNAVA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD

*bhava bandhac chide taṣyai spṛhayaṁi na muktaye
bhavān prabhur aham dāsa iti yatra vilupyate*

Lord Hanumān said, "O Supreme Lord Śrī Rāma, I do not desire liberation from material entanglement if it also destroys my awareness that I am Your servant and You are my master. I

do not want that kind of liberation." (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa)

A devotee speaks to Muktīdevī, the personification in charge of liberation, saying, "Who are you?" She said, "I am liberation personified." The devotee asked, "Why have you suddenly come here?" She said, "O dear one, since you are constantly remembering Lord Kṛṣṇa, I have come here as your maid-servant. Please engage me in your service." Hearing this, the devotee said, "Oh, stay at a distance. I am completely faultless. There is no need for you to cut me with the hatchet of deprivation of devotional service to the Lord by rewarding me with liberation. Just by your fragrance, the wonderful sandalwood paste-like holy name of the Lord may be destroyed. In other words, by accepting you, my awareness that I am a servant to God may be lost, and I may lose the transcendental pleasure that comes from chanting the holy name. Therefore, please go away from here and leave me alone."

King Kulaśekhara also says, "Although Muktīdevī stands at my doorstep with folded hands, I do not desire to accept her because that might destroy my devotional service to the Lord."

A real devotee, while executing devotional service, always meditates and prays to Lord Kṛṣṇa; who is dressed like a cowherd boy and lives in Vṛindāvan; who is decorated with a wonderful crown adorned with a peacock feather; whose broad forehead is anointed with sandalwood paste mixed with musk; who wears shark-shaped earrings that reflect on His two cheeks defeating the pride of Cupid; whose eyes are as wonderful as blossomed lotus petals; whose neck is like that of a conchshell; whose face is slightly smiling; whose lips, where the flute is situated, are as red as a *bimbā* fruit; whose complexion defeats the bluish complexion of newly born rain-filled clouds; who is supremely peaceful; who wears yellow garments that are as bright as sunrays; whose neck is decorated with a *vaijayantī* garland; and who is surrounded by hundreds of young *gopīs* (cowherd girls) of Vraja.

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The misery of a real devotee is when he cannot sufficiently express his appreciation of the Lord and the realizations awarded by Him. Due to intense separation from the Lord and feeling unable to please Him sufficiently, a devotee's heart burns but doesn't turn him into ashes. Feeling this way, a sincere devotee practices devotional service daily to rectify the situation, desiring to achieve the glance of the Lord. Our Spiritual Master, His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda, confirms this kind of feeling as transcendental bliss.

SUPERIORITY OF VAIŚNAVAS

*na śauro na ca śaivo vā na brāhma na ca śaktikāḥ
na ca anya devatā-bhakto bhaved bhāgavatottamāḥ*

"What to speak of the worshipers of other demigods, even the worshipers of the sungod, Lord Śiva, Lord Brahmā, Goddess Durgā, and goddess Kālī are not equal to an advanced devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa." (Prahlāda Saṁhitā)

Although by dint of his divine qualities a pure devotee is in the topmost position, he still considers himself the most insignificant. He knows that although demigods such as Brahmā, Rudra, and Chandra are so powerful, they are also devotees of the Supreme Lord. He respects them for their devotion to the Lord. On the other hand, the worshipers of the demigods are not considered worthy of respect. This is confirmed in the Agnī Purāṇa, where it says that the devotees of Viṣṇu are divine and everyone else is not divine. The reason for this is that the demigod worshipers aspire only for material gain and have no desire to surrender to the Supreme Lord. Even if someone is not free from material desires but strictly follows the devotional

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path, that person is still considered to be divine.

*jīvan muktah prapadyante kvacit sansārā vāsanāṁ
yogino vai na lipyante karmabhir bhagavat parah*

"Sometimes it is seen that even liberated souls become affected by accepting sense gratification. But because they are pure devotees of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, they are spiritually potent and thus do not become bound by their reactions." (Vāsanā-bhāṣya)

When the auspicious desire for pure devotional service arises within the heart, the Supreme Lord Madhusūdana resides there and paralyzes the mind's demands. What else can be said? When the humble devotee performs spiritual activity, that devotee automatically receives transcendental realizations and knowledge by the grace of the Lord. As snakes are easily burnt in a forest fire, similarly pure devotional service quickly destroys a devotee's reactions to actions and also his ignorance. Devotional service is so potent that neither the curse of Durvāsā Muni nor the thunderbolt of Indra can harm a surrendered soul. The Amṛtasāroddhāra literature states, when Yamarāja instructed his messengers that "Neither Brahmā, Śiva, Agnī, Vāyu, Indra, I, nor any other demigods can arrest a real devotee. He is under the shelter of the Supreme Lord Harī. What to speak of a devotee, anyone who is connected with the Supreme Lord becomes free from my jurisdiction." This means that the immediate family of that devotee and their forefathers for twenty-one generations become purified, and this was confirmed by Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva to Prahlāda Mahārāja.

CHANTING THE HOLY NAME OF GOVINDA

vartamānañca yat pāparāṁ yad bhūtarāṁ yad bhaviṣyati

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tat sarvam nirdahaty āśu govindānala kīrtanāt

“If the fire-like holy name of Govinda is chanted repeatedly then the outcome of that chanting destroys the sins of the past, present, and future of the devotee.” (Laghu Bhāgavatāmr̄tam)

In the *Itihāsa Samucchaya*, Nārada Muni says that the chanting of the holy name of the Lord is so powerful that it destroys even the seeds of sin. That is why a pure devotee is able to purify the whole world, just like the bright sun that illuminates all directions. Such a devotee is understood to have previously performed all kinds of religious duties. But those who have not yet adopted devotional life are considered impure even though they may perform all kinds of religious duties.

*sakṛdeva prapanno yas tavāsmi iti ca yācate
abhayarāṁ sarvathā tasmai dadāmy etad vrataṁ mama*

Lord Rāmachandra says, “If someone takes shelter at My feet and says, ‘O Lord, from today onward I am Yours,’ I protect that person from all kinds of fear. This is My vow.” (Vālmīki Rāmā�ana)

Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa states in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (4.11) that He rewards one according to their surrender. One should be fixed on Lord Kṛṣṇa, but if one’s mind is attached to sense gratification, it cannot be fixed on Lord Kṛṣṇa. Just as a swan is not attracted to muddy water, so when one’s natural pure consciousness is mixed with material desires, one is unable to attract the swan-like Supreme Lord to manifest there.

If the tongue is contaminated due to mundane speech and lying, it cannot purely chant and glorify the holy name of the Lord. This is just like the shining moon that, being covered with clouds, cannot dissipate the darkness. Thus, surrender unto the Supreme Lord should be carefully practiced under the good care

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of a pure and scripturally qualified devotee who keeps no grudges against anyone.

SURRENDER IS THE PRIMARY REQUIREMENT

'āvrttir asakṛd upadeśāt'

"The scriptures repeatedly state that anything that is spiritually potent has to be repeated again and again." (Vedānta Sūtra)

Human beings are generally offensive. Those who have stopped making offenses and have taken a vow to please the Supreme Lord by repeating His holy names will immediately be benefited. If those who are offensive learn to control their tongues, ears, and other senses properly, they will give up their offensiveness and become devotees and chant the Lord's glories.

Since Lord Harī is always worshiped according to scriptural injunctions, a person cannot be called a devotee without worshipping Him and abiding by His instructions. Therefore, a Vaisnava should never engage in forbidden activities such as meat eating, illicit sex, gambling, and intoxication. By following scriptural injunctions under the guidance of a pure devotee, one will surely develop unflinching faith in the Lord and will become devoted to Him without any deviation. Such a devotee never desires to have anything from the Lord and is thus addressed as an unalloyed devotee. When a Vaiṣṇava inoffensively performs pure devotional service, Lord Kṛṣṇa accepts that service.

VAIŚNAVAS—THE PARAPHERNALIA OF THE LORD

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*nanu katham tam na svayam prakāśayāmi,
katham iva teṣām apekṣā? tatrāha,
-sadbhir eva dvāra bhūtair anyān anugrahaṇāti
yah sa sadanugraho bhavān iti, yad vā, santa eva
anugraho yasya saḥ tava anugraho yah prāpañcike carati,
sa tadākāra tayaiva carati, na anya rūpatayā ity arthaḥ*

A question may arise, "Why does the Supreme Personality of Godhead not personally preach the process of devotional service in this world so everyone can realize His lotus feet? Why does He depend on the saintly persons to do this preaching work? The answer to this is *sadanugraho bhavān*: the Lord uses the saintly persons as His instruments to mercifully attract the living entities towards Him. Therefore one of His names is Sadanugraha. In other words, the mercy of the Lord appears in this world in the form of saintly people. Whatever mercy is distributed to the living entities of this world is manifested through the saintly persons. There is no other way for the struggling people to achieve the mercy of the Supreme Lord." (Bhakti-sandarbha-tikā)

A real devotee is not selfish but always works for the benefit of others. An example of this is Prahlāda Mahārāja, who did not ask for anything for himself; rather, he prayed to the Lord to excuse his demoniac father. This is the attitude of a Vaiṣṇava, who always thinks of the welfare of the entire world. When a person executes devotional service by giving up all other religious duties and no longer desires to sin, that person achieves happiness. The holy name of the Lord and the Lord Himself are non-different. If the holy name is chanted offenselessly, the Lord immediately becomes manifested in the heart of that devotee and makes the devotee become jolly.

THE SIX DIVISIONS OF SURRENDER

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*ānukulyasya sarikalpa prātikulya vivarjanam
rakṣiyati iti visvāśo goptṛtve varāṇam tathā
ātma nikṣepa kārpaṇye ṣaḍ-vidhā saraṇāgatī*

“The six divisions of surrender are: (1) accepting those things favorable for devotional service, (2) rejecting those things that are unfavorable for devotional service, (3) having the conviction that the Lord will always protect His devotees, (4) accepting the Lord as one’s own guardian or master, (5) surrendering everything unto the Lord, and (6) always feeling meek and humble.” (Śaraṇāgatī)

A surrendered devotee whose life is free from personal motivation is like a tree, a river, or a cloud—which bears fruits, carries water, or pours rain, respectively, only to benefit others. The tree does not eat its own fruits, nor does the river drink its own water, nor do the clouds keep any water for themselves. Similarly, the unalloyed devotees exist in this world to help the conditioned souls by giving them spiritual life. Prahlāda Mahārāja has proven this statement very nicely. A real devotee separates the spiritual from material like a swan that separates milk from water. He is a sieve that can separate the purity-like rice from the husk-like materialism. Therefore, one should deal with a pure devotee very carefully. The Vyākaraṇa Śāstra states, *sādhayati sarvendriyāṇī yasya saḥ sādhuḥ* (Karmadhāraya): a real devotee is a person who has complete control over his senses. A truly surrendered devotee is very rare in this world. A statement of the Garuḍa Purāṇa states, “Among the twice-born Brāhmaṇas who are well-versed in Vedic knowledge, a devotee of Lord Viṣṇu is the best; and among thousands of devotees of Lord Viṣṇu, an unalloyed devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa is the best.” Such is the rareness of a real devotee, and this is described by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad Gītā 7.3.

ONLY A SELF-REALIZED SOUL CAN KNOW GOD IN TRUTH

*yāvan śrī bhagavataḥ priyatva dharma anubhavas tāvan
utkarṣaḥ nirupādhi-prity aśpadatā svabhāvasya priyatva
dharma anubhavam vinā tu sāksātkāro'py asāksātkāra
eva mādhūrya vinā duṣṭā jhvāyā khaṇḍaṣya eva.*

"When one has experienced love of Godhead, he actually realizes God. But if a person has already been spiritually initiated on the path of unalloyed devotion but has not yet experienced love of Godhead, that person actually should be understood not to have realized God, nor is he able to know God in truth, like a person inflicted with jaundice cannot experience the sweet taste of sugar candy." (Bhakti-sandarbha-tīkā 541)

Unless one has attained love for the Supreme Lord, one cannot go back to Godhead, nor can that person be saved from the repetition of birth and death. It is stated by Lord R̥̄ṣabhadēva, *prītir na yāvan mayī vāsudeve na mucyate deha-yogena tāvat*: "Until one has love for Lord Kṛṣṇa, the son of Vasudeva, who is none other than Myself, that person is certainly forced to take a material body again and again."

*ye tyakta loka dharmārthā viṣṇu bhakti vaśam gatā
dhyāyanti paramātmānam tebhyo'piha namo namah*

"To those who have developed a distaste for fruitive activities and have become intensely attached to the worship of the Supreme Lord through devotional service, and meditate on Him, I pay my humble obeisances to that person again and again." (Hayaśīrṣa-pañcha-tantra)

In the word *namah*, "obeisances," the syllable 'na' stands for negation and 'ma' stands for false ego. Therefore, the word

namah means to become free from false ego while showing humility. *Namah* indicates a negation of the independent nature of the living entity. When obeisances are mutually offered amongst each other they are not meant for one's body, but for their Supersoul living in their bodies. The living entity is eternally dependent on the Supreme Lord and a person should recognize this position and voluntarily place oneself under the control of that Lord. Therefore, a person should give up one's whimsical, independent, and egotistical statements like "I can do anything, I am independent," and so on. If one is truly humble then there is nothing in this creation that is unobtainable to that humble person. A living entity is constitutionally subordinate to the Lord, that is why a living entity should always depend on the mercy of the Lord.

*aharikāra nivṛttānāṁ keśavau na hi dūragaḥ
aharikāra yutānāṁ hi madhye parvata rāśayah*

"If someone is free from false ego, the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is also known by the Name Keśava, is very near to that person; but if one is egotistic, the Lord is situated far, far away, with insurmountable mountains in between." (Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa)

False ego is one of the unwanted qualities in a person. As Lord Kṛṣṇa explains in the Bhagavad Gītā (16.4, 5), due to false ego one remains in ignorance of their real identity. It is stated in the Nīti Vachana, *atigarbe hatālankā ati mānaih ca kauravāḥ*: "Due to excessive pride, Rāvaṇa was destroyed, along with his beautiful Lankā, and due to excessive desire for honor the obstinate Kauravas were destroyed." If this is so then what can be said about insignificant people like us? We can only depend on the mercy of the Supreme Lord and pray for His blessings. One should sincerely pray thus, *parama kāruniko na bhavat parah parama socyātamo na ca matparah*: "O Lord, there is no

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one more merciful than You, and there is no one who has a more critical position than me. Therefore, please be merciful unto me." (Bhakti-sandarbha-tīkā 697) As Lord Kṛṣṇa says to Uddhava, *mad bhaktā pūjābhyadhihikāḥ*, "Worship of My devotee is better than worship of Me." Therefore, everyone should satisfy the Lord's pure devotees to please Him. Lord Viṣṇu becomes pleased when His devotees are satisfied. Of this there is no doubt.

WORSHIPPING VAIŚNAVAS IS THE BEST

*ārādhanānāṁ sarveṣāṁ viṣṇor ārādhanām param
tasmāt paratarām devī tadīyānāṁ samarcanām*

Lord Śiva told Goddess Durgā, "My dear wife, among all kinds of spiritual worship, the worship of Lord Viṣṇu is superior. Even better than that worship is the worship of a real Vaiṣṇava, who is a soul surrendered to Lord Viṣṇu." (Laghu-Bhāgavatāmṛtam 2.4)

THE BAD RESULTS OF CRITICIZING A VAIŚNAVA

Vaiṣṇava means a devotee sincerely engaged in the Lord's service. Engaging in the Lord's service in *mādhūrya-rasa* (conjugal love) is the supreme spiritual activity. Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu and His followers worship Lord Kṛṣṇa in *mādhūrya-rasa*. To quickly satisfy Lord Kṛṣṇa, one should worship such pure devotees. On the other hand, if somebody criticizes such Vaiṣṇava devotees for any reason, then according to Itihāsa Samucchaya, they suffer in hell without a doubt for offending such devotees. One who is an unalloyed devotee is

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never considered low-class, even if that devotee was born in a degraded family. The reason for this is that social orders are only temporary positions in the illusory material existence, and spiritual position is transcendental. Therefore anyone who considers a true devotee to belong to a particular caste, color, or creed is simply an offender.

THE WAYS AND RESULTS OF A DEVOTEE'S SERVICE

*mad bhakta jana vātsalyaṁ pūjayañ ca anumodanam
mat kathā śravaṇe pritiḥ svara-netrādi-vikriyā
viṣṇoś ca kāraṇam nrtyaṁ tad arthe dambha varjanam
svayam abhyarcanam caiva yo viṣṇum noupajīvati
bhaktir aṣṭavidhā hy eṣā yasmin mlecche'pi vartate
sa viprendro munī śreṣṭhaḥ sa jījanī sa ca paṇḍitāḥ
tasmai deyam tato grāhyam sa ca pūjyo yathā hariḥ*

"My dedicated devotees execute eight kinds of devotional service: (1) they relate to Me as My guardians; (2) they enjoy worshiping Me, (3) they feel satisfaction in hearing about Me; (4) they glorify Me with sweet prayers with tears flowing from their eyes; (5) they humbly dance for My pleasure; (6) they always remain meek and humble; (7) they respect everyone, and (8) they never make a business of the Lord's temple. If these eight devotional qualities are found in any Vaiṣṇava that Vaiṣṇava should be respected like a superior Brāhmaṇa and as a great devotee even if that Vaiṣṇava may be born in a dog-eater's family. Such a devotee, even if he seems to be foolish, should be considered to be a wise person and should be given gifts to and one should take gifts from him because such a devotee is as honorable as Lord Hari." (Garuḍa Purāṇa)

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The position of a true Vaiṣṇava is not ordinary. Since mind, body, words and everything else is fully used in the Lord's service, a Vaiṣṇava becomes fully spiritualized, like a copper wire, when connected to the powerhouse, is called an electric wire. Therefore, the Supreme Personality of Godhead states in the Garuḍa Purāṇa that one should worship a pure devotee as equal to Him.

All the residents of Vṛindāban are natural Vaiṣṇavas. They are all-auspicious because they always chant the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Even though some of them do not strictly follow all the rules and regulations of devotional service, nonetheless they are true devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Their love for Lord Kṛṣṇa is natural and has no bounds. Purposely or without purpose, even when they pass on the street they always exchange greetings by saying Rādhe Rādhe or Jai Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Thus, directly or indirectly, they are glorious.

DEVOTIONAL SERVICE PURIFIES ALL SINS

*viṣṇu bhakti samāyukto mithyā cāro'py anāśramī
punāti sakalān lokān sahaśrānsur ivoditaḥ*

"Even if a person was a liar and was an outcaste, if that person is wholeheartedly engaged in the service of the Lord, that person is able to purify the whole world, as the bright sun removes the darkness." (Bhakti-sandarbha 751)

Generally it is said that executing devotional service is like walking on a razor's edge. *Kṣurasya dhārā nisitā duratyayā*. This means a little deviation from this path leads one into difficulty. *Durgām pathas tat kavayoh vadanti*. That is why the great sages have said that remaining a sincere devotee is very difficult. Moreover, the nature of this age of Kali is to degrade

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one because the personality of Kali is the accelerating agent for irreligious principles. Therefore, if due to the influence of this age and past bad habits, a devotee deviates from the path of devotion but later becomes firmly situated in devotion, that devotee has to be considered saintly. (See Bhagavad Gītā, The Song of God, 9.30 and 31). Still, one should not think that a person can simultaneously be situated in transcendental devotional service and act in abominable ways.

A devotee should always remain meek and humble. It is stated in the Garuḍa Purāṇa that even if a devotee hears harsh and dry words from another devotee, still, instead of retaliating, one should humbly beg forgiveness from that devotee, realizing it to be the reactions of malicious acts from the previous life, and cheerfully speak with that devotee with sweet words. Amānināṁ mānadena (Śikṣāṣṭakam). One who does so is a Vaiṣṇava. Lord Kapiladeva confirms this act to His mother, Devahūti. And Lord Śiva also addresses the Supreme Personality of Godhead regarding this qualification of a Vaisnava in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. (4.24.57)

ADVICE OF A SAINTLY PERSON

*rāja-putra cirañjīva mā jīva muni-putraka
jīva vā mara vā sādho vyādha mā jīva mā mara*

A saintly person once stated to a prince, "You should live forever because you are enjoying now but if you die you will suffer the reactions to your present sins." He told a Brahmachārī (an austere student), "It is better if you die now because you are performing great austerities now, but if you die you will enjoy the results of present austerities in the spiritual world." When he saw a real devotee he said, "You either live or die, for

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you both are the same, because either way you will be in transcendental bliss. Now you are transcendently happy because you are serving the Lord, and after death you will continue to serve Him in the spiritual world with great happiness." After seeing a butcher the saintly person said, "You should neither live nor die, because you cannot enjoy in this life nor in the future. You are living a hellish life now by killing animals, and after death you will have to suffer in hell for the sins of killing." (Bhakti-sandarbha 765). Anyone who engages in violence has a hard heart and cannot enjoy the transcendental message of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

The Padma Purāṇa confirms that Vaiṣṇavas always engage in pleasing the Lord. That is why they are free of the shackles of repeated birth and death. Thoughtful, learned souls say that Vaiṣṇavas, due to their unalloyed devotion, their surrender, and their chanting of the holy name of the Lord, are candidates for liberation. Sanat-kumāra states that many kinds of offenders have achieved liberation just by sincerely taking shelter at the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa. If anyone has offended Lord Kṛṣṇa by criticizing Him, but somehow takes shelter of chanting His holy names, that person becomes free from the offense by its potency. According to the Padma Purāṇa, while chanting the holy name of the Lord, one should avoid the offenses to chanting. These offenses can also be nullified by continuously chanting the holy name. Thus, by chanting, a spiritual atmosphere can be created in this world, and everyone can become purified and go back to Godhead.

OFFENDERS OF VAISNAVAS

*nindāṁ kurvanti ye mudhā vaiṣṇavānāṁ mahātmanāṁ
patanti pitṛbhiḥ sārdhāṁ mahāraurava sarijñite*

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*hanti nindati vai dveṣṭi vaiṣṇavān nābhinandati
kṛdhyate yāti no harṣam darśane pātanāni ṣaṭ*

Mārkaṇḍeya Muni told King Bhagīratha, "Those rascals who criticize great devotees of the Lord, harm or kill them, envy or hate them, fail to pay respects to them, do not become happy upon seeing them, or become angry with them—these six people are considered to be low-class and sinful, and they fall into Mahāraurava (greatly ferocious) hell with their whole dynasty." (Skanda Purāṇa)

What to speak of criticizing a pure Vaiṣṇava, even if someone hears the criticism of such a Vaiṣṇava, that person is implicated in the same sin as the criticizer. This is confirmed in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (10.74.40). If someone hears the criticism of the Supreme Personality of Godhead or His pure devotees and does not immediately leave that place, the listener becomes implicated in the same sin as the criticizer and falls into taking his next birth in the lower species of life. Therefore one should be very careful while dealing with a true Vaiṣṇava.

On the other hand, wherever devotees are discussing the pastimes of the Lord and His great devotees, the Supreme Personality of Godhead runs there, just as a cow runs to reach her newly born calf. He confirms this in the Viṣṇu-dharma, saying that He never, even for a moment, leaves those devotees whose minds feel satisfaction by hearing and chanting His glories. Therefore, the association of devotees is very purifying. The position of a pure devotee is so great that just by seeing him even the lowest of mankind becomes purified, whereas one has to touch or dip in the holy waters of the sacred Ganges to obtain purification. Such is the quality and potency of a pure Vaiṣṇava. If one commits an offense at the feet of Lord Hari, one can be forgiven by chanting His holy name, but if one offends a pure Vaiṣṇava, there is no rectification for that person.

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A Vaiṣṇava does not need to wait for the proper time, place, circumstances, or purity of mind to chant the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The name of Lord Kṛṣṇa completely fulfills the desires of the chanter. This is confirmed by Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu in His Śikṣāṣṭakam (2) which is wonderfully sung by His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda. A devotee who chants the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa does not have any attraction for the heavenly planets nor desires to attain Satyaloka, the abode of Lord Brahmā, because the imperishable Lord rewards His pure devotees His eternal spiritual abode. If this is so, then why is there a surprise if one can become free from sin by chanting the holy name of the all-auspicious Lord?

Therefore, a pure Vaiṣṇava is not entangled in the stringent cycle of birth and death. He comes and leaves this world as per his own wish. Such a Vaiṣṇava is never required to execute any of the social duties and ritualistic ceremonies as done by ordinary people. Ordinary social duties are meant to receive good name and fame in this world but do not free one from the material entanglement of birth and death. Since a pure Vaiṣṇava has already achieved the goal of those activities—pure devotion to the Lord—he is not bound to follow them.

ABSTAINING FROM DEMONIAC WORSHIP OR WORSHIPS IN THE MODE OF IGNORANCE

*yakṣānāñca piśacānāṁ madya-māṁsa bhujāṁ tathā
divaukaśānāṁ bhajanāṁ surāpāna samāṁ smṛtam*

"One should not worship semi-demigods, demons, and hobgoblins who eat meat and drink wine, because if one worships such entities, their worship bears result equal to drinking wine." (Padma Purāṇa)

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In this regard Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī comments in the following way:

*ata evāvasyaka pūjanam anyeśāṁ tat svīkṛtair
api madyādibhiḥ pūjā niśiddha, yathā saṅkarṣaṇādināṁ.*

“Even though some authority may recommend to worship such demigods to whom an entity needs to be sacrificed, still one should not offer them such impure items like wine or meat. For example, Vaiṣṇavas worship Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa (another name of Lord Balarāma) who is fond of *vārunī* (a celestial wine), but a Vaiṣṇava offers Him honey instead.” (Jīva Gosvāmī’s *tīkā*)

THE OBSTACLE OF RECEIVING TOO MUCH RESPECT

*sammānāt brāhmaṇo nityam udvijeta viśād iva
amṛtasya eva ca ākārikṣed avamānasya sarvadā*

“A pure Brāhmaṇa feels uneasy when he receives a lot of respect from others because that may increase his ego. That is why he sometimes wishes to receive some disrespect, which feels like nectar for keeping him humble.” (Manu Smṛuti 2.162)

*sammāna ca parāṁ hāṇīṁ yogardheḥ kurute yataḥ
janena amamato yogi yoga siddhīm ca vindati*

“Receiving respect from others is an obstacle on the spiritual path for a spiritualist. That is why any spiritualist who receives disrespect in the form of some criticism from others will quickly achieve spiritual perfection.” (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 2.13.42)

tasmāccaret vai yogi satāṁ dharmām adūṣayan

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janayathavā manyeran gaccheyur naiva sarigatim

"Therefore, a spiritualist, without contaminating his pure process of spiritual life, should act in such a way that others will dislike and find faults in him and thus stay away from him." (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 2.13.43)

One example of this is Jaḍa Bharata, who, although born in a Brāhmaṇa's family, would not regularly bathe, clean his teeth, or wear clean clothes. Consequently, he was very much disliked by the people. He was actually a very advanced devotee, but he acted like this to avoid the association of materialistic people.

In more recent times, one of our great Spiritual Masters, Śrīla Gaura Kiśora Dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja, would remain in a filthy place to chant *japa* so that others would not come to disturb him. Since he was a self-realized soul, sitting in a filthy place and looking dirty did not degrade his consciousness in any way. Also, he did not sit there to attract attention but only to find a peaceful place to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. One should not intentionally commit mistakes or risk hindering his spiritual advancement to gain honor or dishonor, but should let it happen naturally by the will of the Supreme Lord.

*muinī mora bhakta āra grantha bhāgavata
yāra bheda āche tāra nāśa bhala mate*

"Whoever makes a distinction between Me, My pure devotee, and the book Bhāgavatam is sure to be spiritually degraded." (Chaitanya Bhāgavata, Madhya 21.18)

CLASSIFICATIONS OF DEVOTEES

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*śāstra-yuktye sunipuṇa, drḍha-śraddhā yāñra
'uttama-adhikārī' sei taraye samsāra*

"One who is expert in logic and argument, knows all the revealed scriptures properly and who has staunch faith in Lord Kṛṣṇa is considered to be a high class devotee. Such a devotee can help liberate the whole world." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Madhya 22.65)

*yāñhāra darśane mukhe āise kṛṣṇa-nāma
tāñhāre jāniha tumi 'vaiṣṇava-pradhāna*

Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu said, "If just by seeing a Vaiṣṇava one is compelled to chant the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa, then that devotee should be understood to be a first class devotee." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Madhya 16.74)

*śāstra-yutki nāhi jāne dṛḍha, śraddhāvān
'madhyama-adhikārī' sei mahā-bhāgyavān*

"One who is not expert in argument and logic based on the revealed scriptures, but who has firm faith in Lord Kṛṣṇa, that fortunate devotee is considered to be a second-class devotee in devotional service." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Madhya 22.67)

*yāñhāra komala śraddhā, se 'kaniṣṭha' jana
krame krame terīho bhakta ha-ibe 'uttama'*

"One whose faith is shakeable and can be diverted by an unfavorable situation or logic, that person is called a neophyte devotee in devotional life. But, by regularly following the devotional process, that person can also gradually rise to the

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platform of a first-class devotee." (Chaitanya Charitāmrta, Madhya 22.69)

*ei saba guṇa haya vaiśnava-lakṣaṇa
saba kahā nā yāya, kari dig-daraśaṇa*

"All these symptoms mentioned above are the qualities and characteristics of a Vaiśnava, and they cannot all be fully explained, I am just trying to point out some of the qualities." (Chaitanya Charitāmrta, Madhya 22.77)

*kṛpālu, akṛta-droha, satya-sāra sama
nidosa, vadānya, mṛdu, śuci, akiñcana
sarvopakāraka, śānta, kṛṣṇaika-śaraṇa
akāma, anīha, sthira, vijita-ṣaḍ-guṇa
mita-bhuk, apramatta, mānada, amānī
gambhīra, karuṇa, maitra, kavi, dakṣa, maunī*

"A real devotee is always merciful, humble, truthful, equal to all, faultless, magnanimous, mild, and clean. He is without any material possessions, and benefits everyone in every way. He remains peaceful, is a soul surrendered to Lord Kṛṣṇa, and has no material desires. He remains indifferent to material acquisitions and remains fixed in devotional service. He completely controls the six bad qualities: lust, anger, greed, illusion, pride and envy. He eats only what is required to live, and is not inebriated. He is respectful. He is grave, compassionate, friendly, poetic, expert, and does not indulge in idle talks." (Chaitanya Charitāmrta, Madhya 22.78-80)

THE DEVOTEE'S PERFECT POSITION

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*brāhmaṇānāṁ sahaśrebhyāḥ satra-yājī viśiṣyate
satra-yājī sahaśrebhyāḥ sarva vedānta pāragaḥ
sarva vedāntavit koṭya viśnu bhakta viśiṣyate
vaiṣṇavānāṁ sahaśrebhyāḥ ekāntekya viśiṣyate*

“Better than a thousand authentic Brāhmaṇas is a Brāhmaṇa who performs sacrifices. And better than thousands of such Brāhmaṇas is a Brāhmaṇa who has expertly learned the Vedic scriptures. Better than ten million of such expert Vedāntists is a Vaiṣṇava, and better than thousands of such Vaiṣṇavas is an unalloyed devotee of the Lord.” (Bhakti-sandarbha 117)

Among the liberated souls, there is a distinction of superiority and inferiority. Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī states in his commentary on Śrīmad Bhāgavatam saying that the Pāṇḍavas are better devotees than Prahlāda Mahārāja because Lord Kṛṣṇa relates with the Pāṇḍavas as His maternal cousin but does relate like this with Prahlāda and does not reside in his palace. Thus gradations are seen among devotees. Regardless of the gradation, one should remain a devotee and continuously perform favorable devotional service to please Him.

Thus ends the Second Chapter of the Vrajavāsī Realization.

THE SPIRITUAL MASTER



गु शब्दत्वन्धकारः रु शब्दस्तुनिरोधकः ।
अन्धकार निरोधत्वादगुरुरित्यभिधीयते ॥३॥

*gu śabdas tv andhakāraḥ ru śabdas tu nirodhakāḥ
andhakāra nirodhatvād gurur ity abhidhīyate*

The word *gu* signifies darkness, and *ru* signifies one who removes it. Due to his ability to remove the darkness of ignorance, a pure spiritualist is called the Guru.

SPIRITUAL MASTER MUST BE A VAIŚNAVA

The Vedic scriptures state that only a pure and qualified Vaiṣṇava who has truly realized God can function as the Spiritual Master for everyone in this world. Such a Spiritual Master is called Guru in the Sanskrit language. He acts on behalf of God to reward liberation to the serious candidates. The Sanskrit word “Guru” means “Heavy with spiritual knowledge.” This means that such a Guru’s spiritual knowledge is as deep as the ocean. God sends such a Guru into this world to act as His authorized representative to register the names of serious candidates in God’s register by rewarding them spiritual initiation. In this way, when these disciples reach the spiritual world they are

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recognized by God there. But those fake gurus who are not authorized by God cannot register any names with God and thus their disciples remain unrecognized by God. Such unauthorized gurus and their disciples do not receive God's blessings and thus remain bereft of liberation from this world because their names do not exist in God's register. Therefore, one should be very careful while accepting spiritual initiation, because in Kaliyuga every guru claims to be an authentic Guru. But an authentic Guru is authentic because he is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures written by Śrīla Vyāsadeva. Such an authentic Guru is only found by those who are destined to be liberated from this world. Everyone else has to wait for reformation for receiving liberation. That is why choosing the right Guru in life is very essential. As it is stated:

*mahā kulā prasūtopi sarva yajñeṣu dīkṣitah
sahaśraśākhādhyāt ca no guruṁ syād avaiṣṇavah*

"One may be a Brāhmaṇa, born in a very high cultured family, may know how to perform many categories of sacrifices and perform rituals, and may also know all branches of philosophy, but if he is not a Vaiṣṇava, he cannot function as a Spiritual Master for anyone." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa)

Even if one is a high-class Brāhmaṇa, and expert in performing all kinds of social and religious duties, if he is not a Vaiṣṇava, the scriptures clearly disqualify him to act as a Spiritual Master. The Nārada Pañcharātra states, "If one has received mantra initiation from a non-Vaiṣṇava, that person falls into hell and if one wants to be saved from going to hell then one should take re-initiation properly from a pure Vaiṣṇava Guru." All the scriptures declare that the Spiritual Master must be a pure devotee, totally absorbed in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, and should be expert in freeing his followers from material existence by cutting their knot-like doubts.

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Sometimes even a spiritual teacher who is not authorized to initiate is called an *āchārya* in Sanskrit, which indicates that such a spiritual teacher teaches what he practices himself. Such an *āchārya* is different from the Spiritual Master, who is also addressed as an *āchārya* in Sanskrit. The qualification of an *āchārya* who functions as a Spiritual Master is as follows:

*rāga dveṣādi samanād ācārya iti kīrtyate
divya-bhāva-pradānāc ca skhalanāt kalmaśasya ca*

"One who has fully conquered his lust, anger, greed, etc., is self-realized, expertly delivers realized transcendental knowledge to everyone to purify their sins, and removes ignorance is addressed as a Spiritual Master and an *āchārya*." (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 17)

The Spiritual Master is an *āchārya* who also teaches what he practices, but he is so pure that he is able and is authorized to take his followers to the spiritual world. For example, Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu told Rāmānanda Rāya in the Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, "Whether one is a Brāhmaṇa, a Sanyāsī, or even a Śudra—no matter what he is—if he knows the science of Lord Kṛṣṇa in truth, he is able to teach spiritual life." Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu did not say that that devotee can function as Guru to spiritually initiate disciples because Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu did not take spiritual initiation from Rāya Rāmānanda. Nor did Rāya Rāmānanda ever spiritually initiate anyone in his life. Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu had applied the word Guru for a low-born devotee who knows Kṛṣṇa in truth to function only as a spiritual teacher and not as Spiritual Master.

Lord Kṛṣṇa states in the Bhagavad Gītā (7.3) that a Guru must have received spiritual perfection in his past life and thus a pure devotee in the present life. Unless Guru has perfection in his last life he cannot be born as a pure devotee in his present life. As per Lord Kṛṣṇa (Bhagavad Gita 6.40-to-42) such a

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perfected devotee does not take a low-birth in his present life. It means, only a pure devotee is authorized by all the scriptures to function as Guru because he is pure since his previous birth. Such a Guru is able to take serious candidates along with him to the spiritual world. But those who were born into impure families they must be understood that their previous birth was not pure and also had dirty habits before adopting spiritual life. Such devotees should only focus on their own liberation because they do not have any capacity to take others to the spiritual world. An appropriate Vedic example of this is about the swimming of a dog. A dog may swim across a body of water but cannot take others across with him. Those who do not know how to swim they cannot hope to go across by holding the dog's tail. If they tried so, they will themselves sink along with the swimming dog. One has to get hold of a pure devotee to go across the ocean of birth and death to obtain liberation. Besides this, there is no other way.

One must be careful about misleaders in this regard. What to speak of anyone else, even a traditional Brāhmaṇa who is pure and is expert in his functions of spirituality such as performing sacrifices and helps others to perform sacrifices; who studies Vedic literatures and teaches them to others; accepts charity and gives charity; and also knows the mantras and *tantras* (magical formulas to attain supernatural powers), he cannot function as Guru if he is not a pure Vaiśnava who knows the science of Lord Kṛṣṇa in truth. Therefore, one must be very careful in regard to whom one dedicates one's life by accepting spiritual initiation.

SYMPTOMS AND RARENESS OF A QUALIFIED GURU

kṛpāsindhu susampūrṇaḥ sarva satvopakārakah

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*niśprhah sarvataḥ siddhah sarva vidyā viśāradah
sarva saṁśaya sañcchettā 'nalaśo gurur āhṛtaḥ*

"A pure devotee is an ocean of mercy, he feels pain by seeing others unhappy, he is always content in himself, he works for the welfare of others; he does not desire sense gratification; he is perfect in all respects; he is expert in scriptural knowledge; he is expert in removing the doubts of his followers, and is never lazy. Such a devotee should be accepted as one's Spiritual Master." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1. 45, 46)

A person who is very serious about perfecting his life and going back to Godhead should be very careful about accepting spiritual initiation. Ideally, the Spiritual Master should be a pure Vaiṣṇava born in a Brāhmaṇa family, because since childhood naturally he would have been educated in the Vedic process. If such a Brāhmaṇa-born Spiritual Master cannot be found after great research, then a candidate may take mantra initiation from any higher class (*varna*) pure Vaiṣṇava available who has seen Lord Kṛṣṇa in truth, since true Vaiṣṇavism is transcendental to all social orders (Digdarśinī-tīkā).

Any pure Vaiṣṇava can become a *vartma-pradarśaka-guru* (a devotee who is acting as a teacher to direct one to adopt the spiritual path). But to take complete charge of the life of a disciple, as an initiating Guru does, one must be a pure devotee, fully self-realized, and highly qualified. Such a devotee must be peaceful, purified in mind, expert in Vedic scriptures, expert in the process of initiation, expert in the processes of installing the deities and worshiping the deities, and must be pure from his previous life. He must also be authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures to function as a Guru, he must be very enthusiastic in his spiritual practice, he must be devoted to his own Spiritual Master, not greedy for wealth or false prestige, he should be fearless and not too hasty, and he must speak only his spiritual realizations and not just what he read from the books.

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If such a Spiritual Master is found then it must be understood that one's previous karma is very good.

After accepting spiritual initiation from such a Spiritual Master one should worship the Lord, hear His glories with faith, glorify His transcendental qualities and activities, meditate on His lotus feet, and worship the deities according to scriptural rules. In this way, one is able to diminish the influence of lust, anger, greed, illusion, madness, and jealousy. By following this process, a disciple will gradually but surely attain the platform of self-realization—love of Godhead.

A real Vaiṣṇava Spiritual Master by nature is very attached to the Lord's lotus feet. He is intensely attached to hearing and chanting the glories of the Lord, remains completely fixed in the Lord's lotus feet and naturally follows the process very seriously. Because he always strictly follows the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he remains fully purified and free from the desire for sense gratification. These are some of the symptoms of a self-realized Guru. If one sees and hears from such a pure Guru, one's heart and mind becomes joyful. Such a Spiritual Master is fully qualified and knows the complete standard of deity worship, deity installation, temple construction, and the Vaiṣṇava etiquette. He also knows when the personality of the deity no longer lives within the deity. He knows what to do if the deity is broken, cracked, burnt, or not worshiped regularly up to the promised standards, if the deity has been contaminated by the touch of a four-legged animal, or worshiped with a mantra meant for another deity—such as Lord Chaitanya being worshiped with the mantra for Lord Nityānanda, or Lord Nityānanda being worshiped with the mantra for Lord Chaitanya. Such a Spiritual Master is said to be equal to God and he is called *sevaka-bhagavān* (the worshiper-God) and not *sevya-bhagavān* (worshipped-God).

na calati yauccaiḥ śrī bhagavat padārvinde

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śitamanas tam avehi viṣṇu bhaktam

Lord Yamarāja says, "Any person who does not become disturbed by lusty desires and who is strictly attached to the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is known as a real Vaiṣṇava and such a person does not belong to hell." (Viṣṇu Purāṇa)

When all materialistic desires are totally eradicated from the heart of a person and one is totally fixed in devotional service, such a person gradually becomes self-realized and becomes liberated even while alive in this world. On such a stage the devotee's mind does not become disturbed by the opposite gender in any circumstance, nor does it burn with anger to get revenge, nor is it tied with the rope of greed. Such a spiritually fixed devotee is able to spiritually conquer the whole world and make it Kṛṣṇa conscious.

*aciṇoti yaḥ śāstrārtham ācāre sthāpayatya 'pi
svayam ācarati yasmād ācāryas tena kīrtitah*

"One who understands the essence of Vedic literatures properly, personally practices them all, and teaches them to others as the standard for spirituality through practice and personal example, is said to be an āchārya." (Vāyu Purāṇa)

*sarva lakṣaṇa sampannah sarva avayava śobhitah
sarvāgamārtha tatvajñah sarva tantra vidhāna vit
loka sammohana ākāro deva vat priya darśanah
śumukhah sulabhaḥ svaccho bhrama sarṇśaya nāśakaḥ*

"One who is equipped with all good qualities, who has all his bodily limbs and is not deformed due to a reduction of bodily parts, who properly knows the essence of all Vedic literatures in truth, who systematically knows the traditional rituals and the

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rules of deity worship, who attracts everyone with his charms, whose appearance is as pleasing as that of the demigods, who speaks sweetly, who is easily approachable, who is very clean, and who is able to remove all spiritual doubts, is a devotee qualified to be the Spiritual Master." (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 13)

In addition to all of the above qualifications, a bona-fide Spiritual Master always engages his disciples in the service of God, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Although he accepts service from his disciples on behalf of the Supreme Lord, he does not develop a habit of engaging them in his personal service, apart from serving the Lord. He does not make disciples out of greed to obtain donations, nor does he desire to increase his false prestige by having them worship him. Instead, he is actually an ocean of mercy, very kind, and his presence in this world is just to benefit others. His wealth of knowledge is unfathomably deep, just like the ocean, which is filled with all kinds of wealth.

*irīgita ākāravit prājñah uhāpoha vicakṣanah
antar lakṣo vahir drṣṭih sarvajño deśakāla vit
ajñā siddhis trikālajño nigrahānugraha kṣamah
vedhako bodhakah sāntah sarva jīva dayā karah*

"One whose physical appearance reveals his internal consciousness, who is very expert and wise, who does not speculate, who does not destroys anybody's spiritual feelings, who even understands what is going on in the heart by just looking at the person externally, who properly understands things according to time and place, who also understands the past, present, and future, who controls his senses, who is very kind and forgiving, who reminds others about the hellish conditions of life, who is always peaceful and very merciful towards all the living entities, is qualified to function as the Spiritual Master." (Kulārṇava-rahaśya)

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A bona-fide Spiritual Master is not mechanical, impractical, or impersonal in his dealings. His personality charms and changes the hearts and minds of those who associate with him. His association intensifies one's spiritual attitude regarding devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa. He does not perform mystical feats, like transforming an apple into an orange, but since he is expert in the *pañcharātrikī-vidhī*, (that teaches rules of deity worship that include the processes of purification) he transforms a person from any *varṇa* or even an outcaste into a sincere Vaiṣṇava by rewarding them spiritual initiation. He is satisfied with whatever is supplied by its own accord, remains pure in heart, and knows the complete standards of spiritualism.

*sad bhakta vatsalo dhīraḥ kṛpāluḥ smita pūrṇa vāk
bhakti-priyaḥ samo devī gambhīraḥ śiṣṭa sādhakāḥ
alolupo hy asaṅgaś ca pakṣapātī vicakṣaṇaḥ
niḥsarīgī nirvikalpaś ca nirṇītātmāti-dhārmikāḥ*

Lord Śiva tells his wife, Pārvatī, "Anyone who becomes pleased with a sober and merciful sincere devotee, who smiles when he speaks, who is charming to the devotees and equal to everyone, who is grave, who is fixed in his daily devotional service, who is free from greed and from bad association, who is free from taking sides, who clearly sees the future, who is unselfish, who does not make compromises, who is fixed in the self, and who is very pious should be accepted as one's Spiritual Master." (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 13)

A true Guru does not argue with others just to show off his learning, but only endeavors to remove the ignorance of the sincere. He uses all his knowledge, spiritual potency, and realizations to help take the living entity across material existence. He is sincerely humble, and his opinions agree with all the scriptures and the previous *āchāryas* (spiritual authorities). He is very soft and meek but is very strict in his dealings as well.

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His natural propensity is to teach spiritual knowledge to those who will listen. His wonderful qualities help others to understand God.

*yah praśannah kṣaṇārdhena mokṣa ratnam prayacchati
durlabham tam vijāṇīyād bhava-sāgara tārakam
kṣudhitasya yathā tuṣṭir āhārād dṛṣyate yathā
tathā upadeśa mātreṇa jñānado durlabho guruḥ*

"One who becomes pleased very quickly should be understood to be a very rare personality and such a personality delivers the sincere from material existence by bestowing the most valuable blessing, the process of liberation. Just as a hungry person feels satisfied by eating food, similarly a true Guru satisfies the spiritual hunger of his disciples just by rewarding spiritual knowledge. Such a Guru is a true Guru and is very rare in this world." (Kulārṇava-rahasya 13)

Whether the Spiritual Master is *nitya-siddha* (eternally perfect), *sādhana-siddha* (became perfect by following the spiritual process), or *kṛpā-siddha* (divine mercy was extended to him), he has to be a pure devotee and not otherwise. He must be always consciously situated in the spiritual world. He must be a pure devotee and should be equal and impartial to all while preaching. Due to his sense control, he is never frustrated. He should not maintain grudges against anyone. He should become very easily pleased. He should be easily approachable even by a grievously sinful person and even by one who mistreated him. He is very tolerant but strict and uncompromising.

*guravo vahavah santi dīpavac ca gṛhe gṛhe
durlabho'yam gurur devī sūrya vat sarva dīpakah
guravo bahavah santi veda śāstrādi pāragah
durlabho'yam gurur devī para tatvārtha pāragah*

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*guravo bahavaḥ santi śiṣya vittāpahārakah
durlabho'yaṁ guru devī śuṣṭy duḥkhāpahārakah*

Lord Śiva said, "O wife, just as in every house there is a lamp, so also there are many Gurus in this world. It is, however, very rare to achieve a Guru who is likened to the sun, who is the sum total of all lamp-like Gurus. O Devī, there are many Gurus who are expert and well-versed in Vedic scriptures, but the Guru who is both well-versed in the scriptures and also has realized the Supreme Absolute Truth is very rare to obtain. O Devī, there are many Gurus who accept disciples just to usurp their wealth as donations, but a Guru who also removes the topmost miseries of birth and death by rewarding liberation is very rare." (Kulārṇava-rahaṣya 13)

*śarikayā bhakṣitam̄ sarvam̄ trilokyaṁ sa carācaram̄
sa śankā bhakṣitā yena sa gurur deva durlabhaḥ
yathā banhi samīpasthaṁ navanītaṁ viliyate
tathā pāpaṁ viliyeta sadācārya samīpataḥ*

"All the living entities in this world, both movable and immovable, are being swallowed by doubts about God. The Spiritual Master who destroys their doubts is very rare. Just as butter melts in the presence of fire, similarly the fire-like association of a pure Spiritual Master melts (destroys) the sins of the sincere." (Kulārṇava-rahaṣya 13)

The Padma Purāṇa states, *guruṣu nara-matir yasya vā
nārakī saḥ*, "Anyone who thinks a pure Spiritual Master to be an ordinary human being has a hellish mentality." The human form of life is very rare to obtain but it has been obtained now. It can award all benefits, including liberation from this world. The human body can be compared to a perfectly constructed boat in which the pure Spiritual Master functions as an expert captain to sail it. The instructions of the Personality of Godhead stated in

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the Vedic scriptures act as the favorable winds to impel the boat on its course. A person who has all these benefits but does not use their human birth to go across the ocean of material existence should be considered to be the killer of their own soul. Therefore, to succeed in human life, one must approach a bona-fide and pure Spiritual Master with a humble attitude to burn one's sins so liberation from this world is obtained.

A GURU TEACHES BY WORD AND EXAMPLE

*āpane ācare keha, nā kare pracāra
pracāra karena keha, nā karena ācāra*

"There are some devotees who follow all the rules of the Vedic scriptures perfectly but do not preach them to others, whereas there are some who preach the Vedic rules (Kṛṣṇa Consciousness) to others but do not abide by them properly themselves." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Antya)

*'ācāra', 'pracāra', -- nāmera karaha 'dui' kārya
tumi- sarva-guru, tumi jagatera ārya*

"The Lord has personally established by His own example how a devotee should simultaneously follow the duties of practicing the scriptural rules properly and also preach them to others along with chanting the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa. For this reason, the Lord is the Spiritual Master of the entire world and is the most civilized devotee in the world." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Antya)

*kularī śīlarī atha ācāram vīcārya gurum gurum
bhajeta śravaṇādyathīm sarasam sāra-sāgaram*

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*kāma krodhādi yukto'pi krpaṇo'pi viṣādavān
śītvā vikāśam āyāti sa vaktā paramo guruḥ*

"If one finds a dispassionate speaker who is well-versed in the Vedic scriptures and speaks them very charmingly, one should accept him as their Spiritual Master after carefully considering his spiritual dedication and the purity of his dynasty. Even if he is mistakenly seen to be lusty, greedy or sad or becomes easily angry, still if by listening to his speech one becomes blissful, then it should be understood that he has the qualities of the topmost Guru." (Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa)

Even if such a Spiritual Master lacks some worldly knowledge or some social etiquette, but actually knows the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in truth, he should be accepted as one's Guru and not a devotee whose background was impure or makes a show of devotion. It is confirmed in the Nyāya Śāstra, "Everyone should work to free themselves from the repetition of birth and death, and thus, it is necessary for everyone to accept a liberated soul as their Spiritual Master without considering his social etiquette or material qualifications."

A PURE GURU IS NONDIFFERENT FROM GOD

*yasya sākṣād bhagavatī jñāna-dīpa-prade gurau
martyāsad-dhīḥ śrutam tasya sarvam kūñjara-śaucavat*

"The Spiritual Master who enlightens the heart with the torch-like transcendental knowledge should be understood to be the direct representation of the Supreme Lord. But anyone who maintains a misconception of thinking such a Spiritual Master to be an ordinary man; their spiritual enlightenment and the Vedic

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knowledge which was received become useless, like an elephant who takes a nice bath but becomes dirty by throwing dirt over its body right after taking a nice bath." (Śrimad Bhāgavatam 7.15.26)

*śuddha bhaktaḥ śrī guroḥ śrī śivasya ca bhagavata
saha abheda dṛṣṭim tatpriyatamatve naiva manyante.*

"Those devotees who are advanced in spiritual life understand and see that the perfectly pure Spiritual Master whom they obtained is non-different from the all-auspicious Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and also simultaneously understand that he is His very dear servant as well." (Bhakti-sandarbha-tīkā 216)

*guhyāgamātma tatvānāṁ baddhānāṁ bodhanād apī
rudrādi devatā rupāda gurur ity abhidhīyate*

"The real Spiritual Master knows the science of self-realization in truth and reveals the inner meanings of the scriptures to the sincere candidates. Such a Spiritual Master represents the sum total of all the demigods, such as Lord Śiva and other demigods. That is why he is addressed with the title 'Guru.'" (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 17)

The *āchārya* is one who has perfected his own life by strictly following the precepts taught by the previous *āchāryas* and teaches his disciples using the same spiritual science, along with its proper etiquette, both by his words and by practical example.

*tulya nindā stutir maunī nirapekṣo niyāmakāḥ
ityādi lakṣaṇo petaḥ śrī guruḥ kathitāḥ priye
ata eva guruḥ sāksād guru rūpām samanvitāḥ
bhaktyā sampūjayed devī bhukti mukti prayacchatā*

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Lord Śiva said to Pārvatī, "O dear wife, anyone who remains indifferent to criticism and praise, who speaks everything related to Lord Kṛṣṇa, who does not expect anything in return from anyone, who properly follows the scriptural rules and regulations—one who possesses all these symptoms is qualified to be a Guru. Therefore, disciples should worship such a Guru as good as the Supreme Lord Himself, who appears in this world in the form of a human being, because He is the original Guru. Therefore, O Devī, the disciples should worship their Guru with devotion and by doing so, they become blissful while alive and after death achieve liberation from this world." (Kulārṇava-rahaṣya 13)

Only by surrendering unto a pure Spiritual Master can the struggling living entities achieve the mercy of the Supreme Lord in this world. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī states in his Bhakti-sandarbha-tīkā (6.1.8) that a disciple can accept only one initiating Spiritual Master in life. That is why the most important duty for a spiritual seeker is to properly check the spiritual background of the Spiritual Master before surrendering to him, so as to strictly avoid the re-initiation process. But, if for some reason a person takes initiation from an imperfect guru, they must take another initiation from a perfect Guru so as to atone for their mistake.

*nara vat dṛṣyate loke śrī guruḥ pāpa karmanā
śiva vat dṛṣyate loke bhavāni! puṇya karmaṇā
śrī guruṁ paramāṁ tatvam tiṣṭhantam cakṣur agrataḥ
manda bhāgya na paśyanti śūlkāḥ sūryam ivoditam*

Lord Śiva said, "Only those who are still filled with sin see the perfectly pure and bona-fide Spiritual Master to be an ordinary man. But, O goddess, those who are sufficiently pious and have become purified see that very same Spiritual Master to be as good as God and the most auspicious personality. The Supreme God Himself, who is the Absolute Truth, appears in

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front of one's eyes in human form as the Spiritual Master, but those who are very unfortunate cannot see him to be as good as God, just as an owl cannot see the bright sun" (Kulārṇava-rahāṣya 13).

In any condition, everyone should serve the Lord to become purified from sin. Sins have been committed for many births and they cover the pure insight and thus make the person unable to recognize the pure devotee. But the remedy to become purified is to serve the Supreme Lord under the guidance of a pure and perfect Spiritual Master, and by following him, one gradually becomes purified, seeing everything in its spiritual perspective, and goes back to Godhead.

*guru rūpam̄ samādāya bhava pāśa nikuntaye
siddhānta sāra vettāham̄ vījō'ham̄ iti bodha kṛt
yo vettā saccidānandaṁ hared indriyajam̄ sukham̄
sevyās te guravāḥ śiṣyair anye tyājyāḥ pratārakā*

"The Supreme Lord said, I, the Supreme Lord, appear in this world in the form of a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master so as to release one from the clutches of material existence. I speak through the pure Guru the essence of the scriptures in truth and sow the seed of devotion in the heart of the sincere. After taking spiritual initiation, a disciple should worship that pure Guru, chant the holy names, and also speak about them to others so the inclination towards sense gratification gradually becomes removed from the heart and mind. But, one should avoid the connection to those spiritualists who cannot deliver one from this world." (Kulārṇava-rahāṣya 13)

The true Spiritual Master is the external manifestation of the Supersoul and is the sum total representation of all the demigods, *sarva deva mayo guru*. Furthermore, *kṛṣṇa*, *guru*, *bhakta*, *śakti*, *avatāra*, *prakāśa*; *kṛṣṇa ei chāyā-rūpe karena vilāsa*: "Lord Kṛṣṇa enjoys by manifesting Himself as the

perfectly pure Spiritual Master, as the sincere devotees, as the diverse energies, as incarnations, and as plenary portions. In essence these six are one and the same in quality." Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī advises the sincere disciple about how the Lord and Spiritual Master should be worshipped in the following way:

*tathā pīṭha pūjāyām bhagavad dhāme śī guru-
pādukā pūjanām evam sarigacchate, yathā-
eva bhagavān atra vyāṣṭi rūpa tayā bhakta
avatāratvena śī guru rūpo vartate, sa eva tatra
samaṣṭirūpa tayā sva-vāma pradeśe sākṣād
avatāratvena api tad rūpo vartate iti*

"While worshiping the Supreme Lord on the altar, a devotee should worship the shoes of the Spiritual Master, keeping them on the left side by placing them below the deity of the Lord. The reason is that the Supreme Lord appears before us in the form of the Spiritual Master, which is why he is seated there (on the altar) on the left side. Guru is the collective representation of all the demigods, and is the direct human incarnation of God, the Supreme Personality of Godhead." (Bhakti-sandarbha-tikā 907)

A true Spiritual Master is a pure devotee but always thinks himself to be a very lowly devotee, even though he is fully qualified and represents all the demigods. Even though he is worshiped by his disciples as good as God, still, he never thinks, "Oh, my disciples worship me as good as God; therefore, I have become God." But instead he thinks, "O Lord Kṛṣṇa, I am very unqualified, and I pray to You, please accept the worship of these sincere souls and purify them to become eligible to go back to Your abode." Although a pure Spiritual Master always thinks himself to be unqualified and lowly, his position is totally transcendental to this world. As it is stated:

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*guru kṛṣṇa-rūpa hana śāstrera pramāṇe
guru-rūpe kṛṣṇa kṛpā karena bhakta gaṇe*

"According to the deliberate opinion of all the revealed scriptures, the Spiritual Master is nondifferent from Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself appears in the form of a pure Spiritual Master to deliver His true devotees." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Ādi)

UNQUALIFIED GURUS

*guru lobhī, śiśā lālacī, donorī khelai dārīva
donorī dūbe vāpare, baitha patthar kī nāva*

"If the Spiritual Master is very greedy to obtain money and the disciples have unlimited sensual desires then, even though they take spiritual vows near the fire sacrifice at the time of spiritual initiation, they both remain materialistic, and foolishly drown in the ocean of material existence, as if sitting on a boat made of stone." (Kabīr dāsa)

A Spiritual Master must be a totally pure devotee so as to be able to take the disciples back to Godhead. Sometimes it is seen that materialistic people as a fashion accept spiritual initiation from a so-called Spiritual Master, but both the parties remain without any spiritual benefit. A real Spiritual Master, by nature, is very strict while dealing with his disciples so as to keep them spiritually fit, and not go astray from the spiritual path. Accepting spiritual initiation means being sincerely dedicated to following and serving the Spiritual Master. But the pseudo-spiritual master flatters his so-called disciples, deals indirectly with them, and thereby both the master and the ward go to hell without a doubt.

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*paramārtha gurvāśrayo vyavahārika guru
ādi pratyagena api kartavyaḥ*

“One should reject a worldly-minded, materialistic, and spiritually unqualified Guru who is not authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures and should take shelter of a qualified and perfectly pure Vaiṣṇava Guru who is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures, so as to be able to reach the spiritual world.”
(Bhakti-sandarbha-tikā)

*asatya niṣṭhura aśaktam grāmyādi bahu bhāṣīṇam
kuvicāra kutarkādi kārakam kalaha-priyam
vṛthākṣepakaram mūrkham cārvākam vāgviḍambakam
parokṣe dūṣaṇa-karam pratyakṣe priya-vādinam*

“If a spiritualist who is hard-hearted, materially attached, who is a liar; excessively engages in idle talks, makes bad schemes, presents baseless arguments; provokes fights, likes to quarrel; makes false accusations, is thoughtless, speaks atheistic or made-up philosophy; is expert in word jugglery; is diplomatic, speaks from outside of Vedic scriptures, whose background is unclean, or speaks sweetly and deals nicely before the person, but criticizes them from behind—such a spiritualist is unfit to be a Spiritual Master.” (Kulārṇava-rahaṣya 13)

A real Spiritual Master is very careful in his conduct because his duty is to take his followers back to Godhead. But anyone who holds the title of a spiritualist but acts viciously, always talks about the sins of others, acts sinfully, indicates others to act sinfully, criticizes the good qualities of others, is attached to materialistic ways, always hankers for money even when he has enough, is unqualified to functions as Guru even if he possesses required authenticity. These are some of the immense guidelines that are mentioned in the Vedic literatures to function as Guru.

SYMPTOMS OF AN UNQUALIFIED GURU

Any spiritualist who dresses mostly as per his wish and does not regularly wear Vaiṣṇava clothes; who is unscrupulous; who acts improper to Vaiṣṇavas, watches cinema, likes material sports, breaks Vedic principles; who is fearsome; who is always sleepy, foolish, very slow, lethargic and lazy; who plays cards or gambles; who has very little devotion; who is hardhearted and has no feelings for others; who does not like to follow the laws of the state; who lies; who is offensive; whose speech is meaningless; who is wicked; who is ungrateful, who is diplomatic, who directs his followers away from the Vedic path; who keeps illegally earned money; who associates with loose women; who follows rejected rules of the Vedas; who broadcasts Gāyatrī Mantras; who destroys good and legitimate works; who engages in sinful activities; who is a hypocrite; who always likes to find faults in others; who is very tricky and deceitful; who is ungrateful for rendered service; who makes a breach of trust; who is mischievous and wants to hurt others; who keeps connection with his bodily relations; who is not encouraging; who gives false witness; who is obstinate; who speaks about God but does not believe in Him nor in pleasing Him; who makes a show of his academics; who likes his own glorification but cannot tolerate the praises of one who is qualified; or one who always remains very angry—such a spiritualist should not be accepted as an initiating Guru.

*yo vakti nyāya rahitam anyāyena śiṣnoti yah
tau ubhau narakaṁ ghoram vrajataḥ kālam-akṣayam*

"Those who speak outside of the scriptures and those who listen to such people must go to a ferocious hell for an

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uncertain period of time to suffer there." (Nārada Pañcharātra)

A sincere soul should not devote to serving a spiritualist who instructs from outside of the Vedic scriptures and does not give concrete advice about how to advance on the spiritual path. Such a person, who may look like a spiritualist, should only be paid respects from a distance and kept at a distance. Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī confirms this in the Bhakti-sandarbha, *ata eva dūrata eva ārādhyas tādṛśo guruḥ vaiṣṇava vidveśī cet parityājya eva*: "One should not take instructions from a Guru who speaks outside of the scriptures, but after offering him some respect one should stay away from him. If he is envious and criticizes a purer Vaiṣṇava, he must be totally rejected." (Jīva Goswāmī, tīkā 716). In this regard Lord Paraśurāma also states to Bhīṣmadeva:

*guror apy avaliptasya kāryākāryam ajānataḥ
utpatha pratipannasya parityāgo vidhīyate*

"If a spiritual preceptor goes astray from the spiritual path, engages in abominable activities, and does not understand what is correct to do and what is incorrect to avoid, such a preceptor should be abandoned to further one's spiritual advancement." (Māhābhārat, Udyoga-parva)

In this regard, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura has written in his Harināma-chintāmaṇī as to when a disciple should reject his spiritual preceptor:

*prathame chilen tīṇī sad guru pradhān
krame krame nāmāparādhe harāyā hata-jñān
vaiṣṇave vidveṣa kari chāḍi nāma rasa
krame krame halen artha kāminira vaśa
śiṣya guru dekhi tave śrī kṛṣṇa kṛpāya
sad guru labhiyā punaḥ śuddha kṛṣṇa nāma gāya*

"The Spiritual Master was very pure and was rightly

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situated in the beginning, but due to accumulating offenses against the holy name of the Lord, he loses his inner insight and true knowledge. Thus, he develops envy towards real Vaiśnavas, loses his taste for chanting, and gradually becomes attached to wealth and women. If a sincere disciple finds their Guru in this situation, then it is their duty to pray for the mercy of Lord Kṛṣṇa and take spiritual initiation by taking shelter again at the lotus feet of a scripturally authentic and true Guru so as to chant the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa purely for good results.” (Harināma-chintāmaṇī)

THE GURU AND DISCIPLE EXAMINE EACH OTHER

*sad guruḥ svāśritāṁ śiṣyāṁ varṣam ekaṁ parikṣayet
rājñī ca amātyaja doṣāḥ patnī pāpām sva bhartā
tathā śiṣyārjitaṁ pāpām guruḥ prāpnoti niścitam*

“It is the duty of a bona-fide Spiritual Master to examine a spiritually interested candidate who is staying under his shelter for at least one year before giving spiritual initiation. After taking spiritual initiation, if a disciple cannot follow the instructions and engages in sinning then, just as the sins of the queen go to the king and the sins of the wife are transferred to the husband, so, in fact, the sins committed by the disciples are transferred to the Spiritual Master.” (Sāra Saṅgraha)

Finding this instruction, it should be the duty of a self-realized Spiritual Master to mostly preach the science of God and to not have much interest in increasing the number of disciples. He should neither engage agents, nor present allurements, nor extend material benefits to attract followers. If he preaches purely and depends on Lord Kṛṣṇa, then he can rescue many

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conditioned souls all over the world. Everyone will naturally want to follow such a Guru.

*japa dhyānādi niratāṁ saukhyam ājñādi kāṅkṣiṇam
kula śāstra priyāṁ devī pṛthak śāstra parāṅgmukham
ityādi lakṣaṇopetāṁ guruḥ śisyāṁ parigrahet
śrī guru paramesāñī suddhādvēśo manoharāḥ*

Lord Śiva said, "O Devī, one who regularly chants at least his prescribed amount of *japa* and constantly meditates on the Supreme Lord, is always enthusiastic to please the Lord, who always follows the orders of his predecessors, who is very clean both inside and outside, who enjoys studying devotional scriptures, and who avoids reading materialistic books—a Spiritual Master with such symptoms should be accepted." (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 13)

Haste makes waste. The Spiritual Master should follow the traditional law of giving spiritual initiation to an interested candidate. A candidate must serve him to find if the Guru is worthy to surrender to in order to become a disciple and follow his authority. The scriptures enjoin that before accepting a Guru, a candidate must carefully study the Guru's background to find out if that Guru will take his disciples to the spiritual world. The Guru and disciple should not suddenly establish connections by spiritual initiation. The Spiritual Master must test the disciple to find how seriously and enthusiastically the incoming candidate desires to execute devotional service. If the candidate passes the test then spiritual initiation may be rewarded. But by serving a genuine Spiritual Master, a student becomes purified.

If one accepts initiation from, and dedicates oneself to, a bona-fide Spiritual Master—who is a divine deity and greatly honorable personality—and learns the science of self-realization from him, the disciple can easily be disillusioned and become free from false ego. The rule of Guru and disciple is that as soon

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as the disciple sees his Guru, the disciple must pay obeisance to him with full respect, placing the head onto the ground. By doing so, the Lord will certainly extend His mercy unto that disciple.

*guru śiṣyav ubhau mohād aparīkṣa paraśparam
upadeśām dadad gṛhṇān prāpnuyātām piśācatām
aśāstriya upadeśāñ ca yo gṛhṇāti dadāti hi
bhūñjanti tau ubhau ghore narakān eka- viṁśatih*

“Due to illusion, if the Spiritual Master and disciple establish a connection to each other through spiritual initiation without first properly examining each other—the Spiritual Master, for giving the spiritual initiation, and the disciple for accepting the initiation—they both take their next births as goblins. Also, if the Spiritual Master instructs his disciples from outside the scriptures and the disciples accept such instructions, both of them suffer in twenty-one kinds of ferocious hell.”
(Kulārṇava-rahaṣya 14)

A real Spiritual Master ordinarily will not initiate a disciple so easily unless he knows the disciple will properly follow his instructions until he goes back to Godhead. He then gives his association to that disciple to make the disciple meritorious.

*dhana icchā bhaya lobhādyair ayogyam yadi dīkṣayet
devatā śāpam avāpnوتī kṛtam ca niṣphalam bhavet
jñānenā kriyayā vāpi guruḥ śiṣyam parīkṣayet
samvatsaram tad ardham vā tad ardham vā prayatnataḥ*

“If the Spiritual Master, due to greed to have more disciples or due to being scared of the candidate, initiates an unqualified disciple, then that Spiritual Master becomes cursed by the demigods to lose all his merits. The Vedic rule is that a Spiritual Master should examine the candidate with care and

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attention towards their philosophical understanding or their attitude and respect while serving. This test should last at least for one year, half a year, or at least three months." (Kulārṇavārahaśya 14)

A self-realized Spiritual Master knows that the seed of devotional service should not be sown in a barren-land-like unsteady student where it does not fructify. Therefore, it is essential for the prospective Guru and disciple to examine each other carefully before establishing a connection. Otherwise, everything goes in vain. After receiving spiritual initiation, the examination totally ends. A Spiritual Master may examine the disciple in any situation, but certainly a disciple cannot examine the Guru after taking initiation. If the Spiritual Master has untimely initiated the disciple and gives his instructions to that disciple, the disciple may or may not follow it properly, and may remain a debauchee or impure, just like cow's milk that has been mixed with a dog's saliva.

ācāryavān puruṣo veda

"If a sincere person takes shelter, with devotion, of a perfectly pure bona-fide Spiritual Master, then that disciple will surely know the science of the Absolute Truth perfectly." (Chāndogya Upaniṣad)

ETIQUETTE AND FUNCTION OF A SPIRITUAL MASTER

*śāstram papa-haram punyam pavitram bhoga-mokṣadam
śāntidañca mahārthañ ca vakti yaḥ sa jagad guroḥ*

Śāṇḍilya Muni said, "Studying Vaiṣṇava scriptures removes one's sins, makes one meritorious, and purifies one.

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Studying the Vedic scriptures also bestows one with happiness, peace, devotional etiquette, and rewards pleasure while alive and liberation after death. One who narrates these scriptures is called the Spiritual Master of the whole world" (Nārada Pañcharātra).

*mat-kathā vācakāṁ nityam mat kathā śravaṇe ratam
mat-kathā pṛīta manasāṁ nāharāṁ tyakṣāmī tam naram*

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said to Arjuna, "Anyone who regularly speaks My transcendental narrations, which include My glorious pastimes, to the interested; and those who regularly listen to My transcendental pastimes, either alone or congregationally; if they truly rejoice and genuinely feel satisfied with the narrations, then I never leave such people at any time." (Viṣṇu-dharma)

Any person who teaches the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness to innocent people and derives great satisfaction and bliss from doing so achieves the merit of donating the whole earth in charity. Narrating the glories of the Supreme Lord is far superior to just teaching ordinary religious principles.

*kīrtane'py atra tajjñeyāṁ māhātmyāṁ śravaṇe 'sya yat
sidhyati śravaṇām nūnām kīrtanāt svayameva hi*

"Whatever results one achieves by hearing the transcendental glories of the Lord, the same result is achieved by one who speaks them. The speaker certainly achieves perfection because hearing is included in speaking." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 10.535)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī remarks in his *Digdarśinī-tikā* saying that the glories of speaking about Lord Kṛṣṇa are greater than those of just hearing them because the speaker is usually naturally more qualified than the listener.

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*divā prakāśakah sūryah śaśi rātro prakāśakah
gṛha prakāśako dīpas tamo nāśa karah sadā
rātrau divā gṛhasyānte guruḥ śiṣyam sadaivahi
ajñānāyam tamas tasya guruḥ sarvam prāṇāśayet*

"It is known that the day is lit by the sun; the night is lit by the moon; and the darkness in home is daily removed by the lamplight. But the scripturally authentic Spiritual Master removes his disciples' darkness of ignorance at all times and in all places—during the daytime, during the nighttime, and also inside the house." (Padma Purāṇa, Bhūmi-khaṇḍa)

No one can be a better well-wisher in this world than the authentic Spiritual Master, for he opens the transcendental vision of the conditioned soul by imparting transcendental knowledge. Therefore, at least three times a day, a disciple should offer respects to their Spiritual Master, saying, "O master, O ocean of mercy, O friend of the fallen, please be merciful upon me and give me the shelter of your two lotus feet" (Prema-bhakti-chandrikā).

*atha ūrdhvā puṇḍram sumṛdā vidhāya vai
rāmādi dāsyanta atho samuccaret
mantram athavā upadīṣed vidhānato
mālām param tam tulasīm samudbhavam*

"At the time of initiation, a bona-fide Spiritual Master should instruct his disciples to put on upward-extending *tilaka* marks by using sanctified clay, and should award them a spiritual name indicating the Lord, such as Rāma or Kṛṣṇa, and ending with *dāsa* (servant). According to the traditional process, a Spiritual Master should impart the transcendental mantras to the disciples and then give them Tulasī neck-beads to wear." (Vaiṣṇavamatābja-Bkāskara 4.4)

PLEASING THE GREAT, MERCIFUL GURU

*yatināṁ viṣṇu bhaktānāṁ paricaryā parāyaṇaiḥ
īkṣitām api gacchanti pāpino'pi parām gatim*

The Viṣṇudūtas said, "If a disciple who regularly serves a Vaiśnava Sanyāsī that is also functioning as the Spiritual Master sees someone, the seen person, just by being seen by such a disciple, can become eligible to achieve the supreme destination, even though the seen person was a sinner." (Brhannāradīya Purāṇa)

A pure Vaiśnava Spiritual Master is so spiritually potent that if his disciple who regularly serves him with pleasure sees even a sinner, that sinner can become purified and an eligible candidate for liberation. Of course, the sinner must give up his sinful habits to be elevated. But the principle here is that even a sinner can become purified just by being seen by the serious servant of a perfectly pure Spiritual Master. The purity a serious disciple achieves gives good fortune to the seen person so as to take up the path of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. Thus, the seen person gradually goes back to Godhead.

An example of this occurred in South India while Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu was propagating the chanting of the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa there. He instructed some people about the chanting process, and they in turn instructed everyone they met about the importance of chanting. In this way, the servants of the servants of the servants of Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu propagated this message and millions of people accepted the purifying process of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. The reason for this was that the order was originally given by the Spiritual Master of the universe, Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu.

Another example is that once when a learned scholar obtained a signature of defeat from Śrīla Viśvanātha Chakravartī Thākura, he was later defeated by Śrī Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, his disciple. This shows that service to a pure Spiritual Master puts one on a very elevated platform. Even though many obstacles come on the devotional path, a sincere disciple should not deviate even for a moment from the devotional path. Such a serious devotee, in due course, becomes a *mahā-bhāgavata* (a pure devotee) and is able to purify the whole world.

*harau ruṣṭe gurus trāṭā gurau ruṣṭe na kaścana
tasmāt sarva prayatnena gurum eva prasīdayet*

"If Lord Kṛṣṇa somehow becomes displeased with a devotee, their pure and perfect Spiritual Master can save that devotee, but if the pure Spiritual Master becomes displeased with a disciple then there is no shelter anywhere for that devotee. Therefore, certainly it is the duty of a disciple to keep their Spiritual Master satisfied by using all means and endeavors." (Padma Purāṇa).

An offender of a pure Spiritual Master has no solace anywhere. For example, the Manu Smṛuti states that if a person accepts spiritual initiation from a pure Vaiṣṇava Spiritual Master and later rejects him due to some mistake or some madness, that disciple is the lowest of mankind and falls into hell to suffer for ten million *kalpas* (millenniums). The reason is that the pure Spiritual Master is equal to Lord Brahmā, Lord Śiva, and the Supreme Lord. Therefore, one should meticulously and scrupulously worship and please the Spiritual Master in all circumstances and at all times. Lord Kṛṣṇa stated in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, "The pure devotees are always within My heart, and I am always in the heart of My pure devotees. My devotees do not know anything else but Me, and I do not know anyone else but them."

The association of pure devotees is the most rare and valuable commodity in this world and by this alone one can achieve real devotion to the Supreme Lord. But such association is available only to those who have acquired an abundance of merits in their previous lives. The Chaitanya Maṅgala confirms this by stating, "The personality who planted the seed of loving devotion to the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord in my heart is a true friend, true mother, and true father." This is because in every birth, one obtains a mother, a father, and relatives, but one does not obtain a pure Spiritual Master and Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, one should chant Hare Kṛṣṇa regularly and sincerely surrender to a pure Guru.

The poet Tulasī dāsa says, *sādhū saṅgati hari kathā tulasi durlabha doi*: "There are only two rare remedies to remove one's sins—the association of a pure devotee and sincerely listening to narrations about the Supreme Lord." Therefore, one must search out a pure devotee who is authorized and qualified by the scriptural rules and not just by some mortal people who look like devotees. No amount of wealth or votes of people can make anyone a pure devotee. Only a pure devotee can act as Guru. As per the Bhagavad Gītā (7.3) only that devotee who had perfected his spiritual life in his previous life can be a pure devotee in this life and only such a devotee is able to speak the science of Lord Kṛṣṇa in truth. Such a self-realized devotee is authorized by the Supreme Lord to be a Spiritual Master and function as an external manifestation of the Supersoul. When a disciple obtains such a Guru then their Supersoul instructs from within and outwardly as he is in his human form. In other words, the Spiritual Master instructs using his physical body from the outside, and guides the devotee from within as *chaitya-guru* (Supersoul or Paramātmā), thus helping the devotee to make spiritual progress rapidly, just as a potter supports his pot from the inside by placing one hand inside and hits with the other from the outside to make the pot smooth and solid. Similarly,

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the instructions from the physical Spiritual Master and the support from Paramātmā as realizations from within purify the disciple so as to march back to Godhead.

SUBMISSIVELY WORSHIPPING THE WORSHIPER-GOD

*bhaktyā śrī pūrvakāṁ devī! pranamya parikīrtayet
guru nāmnā na bhāṣeta japa kālāt na te priye*

Lord Śiva says, "O dear wife, a disciple should pay humble obeisances to their pure Spiritual Master simultaneously while repeating his *pranāma* mantras. If the disciple needs to tell the name of the Spiritual Master to someone then the disciple should repeat the Guru's name with a humble attitude, with bowed head and with folded hands, after placing 'Śrī' before the Guru's name, then pronounce the full name of the Guru. But he should never freely repeat the Guru's name, not even while chanting *japa*" (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 11).

A Vaiṣṇava disciple should not unnecessarily or disrespectfully recite the name of the Guru because the spiritual potency received from the Guru will become reduced. Therefore it is stated in the Sammohana Tantra, *gopaniyāṁ gopaniyāṁ gopaniyāṁ prayatnataḥ*: "To the best of one's ability and with one's best knowledge, a disciple should always conceal the Gāyatrī mantra and the full name of the Spiritual Master."

*tasmād guruḥ param tīrtham śiṣyānāṁ avanīpate
evam jñātrvā tataḥ śiṣyāḥ sarvadā tam prapūjayed*

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said, "The Guru is the highest place of pilgrimage for his disciples. Understanding

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this, the disciples should therefore always worship him very carefully." (Padma Purāṇa, Bhūmi-khaṇḍa 85.14)

The personality of Godhead, who is the topmost, who always remains unseen to the eyes, and performs wonderful transcendental pastimes, comes down to this world accepting a physical body to teach the ways to worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This proves that even the Lord Himself and the topmost liberated sages also engage in devotional service to please the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī states, *sadbhir eva dvāra bhūtair anyān anugṛhaṇāti yaḥ sa sadanugraho bhavān iti*: "The Lord Himself, by using the saintly persons as preaching instruments, mercifully accepts the sincere living entities for obtaining liberation." (Bhakti-sandarbha-tīkā) In other words, the mercy of the Lord appears in this world in the form of a pure Spiritual Master to spiritually guide the sincere. Whatever mercy is spread to the living entities in this world is manifested through the Spiritual Master, and thus the glories of a pure Spiritual Master is stated thus:

*prathamāṁ tu gurum pūjya tataś caiva mamārcanam
kurvan siddhim avāpnoti hy anyathā niṣphalaṁ bhavet*

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said, "If a devotee first worships the pure Spiritual Master and then worships Me, that devotee achieves perfection in life. If this rule is not properly followed, then whatever worship is rendered remains fruitless." (Vāmana-kalpa)

According to the Nārada Pañcharātra, anyone who considers a pure Spiritual Master to be equal to Lord Śrī Viṣṇu, and serves him with that mood and devotion using body, mind, and words is a true Vaiṣṇava and a real knower of the scriptures. Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī gives wonderful commentary (in the Bhakti-sandarbha-tīkā 629) in this regard, stating that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is the deliverer of true knowledge by

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directly appearing in the form of a pure Spiritual Master to instruct mankind. Therefore, no one should ever have a material conception about the pure Spiritual Master, who is the divine potency of the Lord.

THE ASSOCIATION OF A VAISNAVA

*yasya yat saṅgatih puriṣo maṇivat ṣyāt sad-guṇah
sva kulād ḥdhyai tato dhīmān svayuthyān eva saṅśrayet*

"Whatever company one keeps determines the quality one achieves, just as whatever kind of light a pearl contacts determines the kind of light it reflects. Therefore an intelligent person should associate with a pure Vaiṣṇava to improve their own qualities." (Hari-bhakti-śuddhodaya)

A Vaiṣṇava should always avoid the company of non-Vaiṣṇavas. *Asat-saṅga tyāga ei vaiṣṇava ācāra*: The characteristic of a real Vaiṣṇava is that, by nature, they avoid association of worldly minded people. Not only that, a spiritually inclined person should only associate with wonderful devotees and simultaneously follow scriptural injunctions. This is stated by a Hindi Poet Rahīm, *ocheṅi saṅgati buddhi ghaṭai*: "If one associates with spiritually unqualified people, one's intelligence becomes reduced." (see Bhagavad Gītā (13.22)).

PLEASING THE VAISNAVAS

*tasmād viṣṇu prasādāya vaiṣṇavān paritoṣayet
prasāda sumukho viṣṇus tenaiva syān na saṅśayaḥ*

"Just to please Lord Śrī Viṣṇu, it is the duty of everyone

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to work in such a way that satisfies the true Vaiśnavas because the Supreme Lord becomes pleased when such devotees are satisfied. Therefore, without any doubt, everyone should try to please real Vaiśnavas." (Itihāsa-Samucchaya)

Confirming this, Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī writes, "Lord Śīva told Goddess Durgā, 'My dear wife, although the Vedas mention the worship of the demigods in many places, but the worship of Lord Śrī Viṣṇu (a name of Lord Kṛṣṇa) is more highly recommended in them, even higher than that is the worship of the Lord's pure Vaiśnava, who is related to Lord Viṣṇu.'" (Laghu Bhāgavatāmṛtam, 2.4) Furthermore, Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the Śrimad Bhāgavatam, *mad bhaktā pūjābhyaadhikā*: "Worship of My real devotee is better than My own worship." Therefore, every sincere devotee should carefully worship a scripturally authorized pure devotee, the Spiritual Master.

WORSHIPING THE SPIRITUAL MASTER AFTER WORSHIPING LORD KRŚNA

*arcayitvā tu govindāṁ tadīyān nārcayet tu yaḥ
na sa bhāgavato jñeyāḥ kevalāṁ dāmbhikāḥ smṛtaḥ*

"Anyone who does not worship the Spiritual Master after worshiping Lord Śrī Govinda (a favorite name of Lord Kṛṣṇa) cannot be called a real devotee. Rather, such a person can only be called a hypocrite." (Padma Purāṇa)

This verse refers to worshiping the Spiritual Master congregationally in *guru-pūjā*. The *guru-pūjā* (worshipping the pure Guru) is a ceremony which should be held after the morning *darśana* (seeing the Lord). It is the duty of disciples to perform *guru-pūjā* to express their sincere gratitude to the Spiritual Master for directing them on the transcendental path.

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The pure Spiritual Master is the worshipable lord for the disciples, birth after birth, *janme janme prabhū sei*.

*sthite tiṣṭhē vrajed yāte nīcair āśīta cāsatī
śiṣyo guror nṛpa śreṣṭha pratikūlam na sañcāret*

"When the Spiritual Master stands up, the disciple should also stand up. If the Spiritual Master begins walking, the disciple should walk behind him. If the Spiritual Master sits on a seat, the disciple should sit down lower than him. The disciple should never oppose their pure Spiritual Master in any way" (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3.9.4).

A disciple's duty is to follow their scripturally authentic bona-fide Spiritual Master in every way and under all circumstances. Whatever instructions are given should be followed unconditionally. As Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu says, *gurur ajñām avicāraṇīyām*, 'A disciple should take the instructions of the Spiritual Master as their life and soul and should never think 'Oh, now my Spiritual Master is not here, so I can do whatever I want. I do not need to follow what he said.'

ONLY A BONA FIDE GURU CAN BLESS ONE WITH LIBERATION

*baridhe ko baridhā milai, chuṭai kauna upāya
sevā karo nirbaridha kī, palamai deya chuḍāya*

"If one shackled person approaches another shackled person for help to be released, how can that person expect to be released? A shackled person cannot release another shackled person. Therefore, the shackled person should please a liberated person who immediately can release the shackled person from the shackle-like material conditioning." (Kabīr dāsa)

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*sarva lakṣaṇa sampanno veda śāstra vidhāna vit
sarva upāya vidhātaiva tatva jñānī guruḥ sa hī¹
abhijñāś coddharen mūrkham na mūrkho mūrkham uddharet
śilāṁ santārayen norhi na śilā tārayec chilāṁ*

"One who has all good qualities, who follows Vedic injunctions properly, who understands the means and ends of all activities, and one who has knowledge of Kṛṣṇa in truth is certainly a true Spiritual Master. One who knows the Absolute Truth in its real sense can liberate ignorant fools, but an ignorant fool (one who does not know Lord Kṛṣṇa in truth) cannot liberate another one, just as a real boat can take stones across the ocean, but a boat made out of stone cannot." (Kulārṇava-rahaśya)

A DISCIPLE SHOULD ONLY WORSHIP THEIR OWN GURU

*gurau san nihite yastu pūjayed anyam agrataḥ
sa durgatim avāpnoti pūjanam tasya niṣphalam*

"If a disciple's own scripturally authentic Spiritual Master is present before the disciple and if the disciple worships some other Vaiṣṇava before the Guru, then that disciple is certainly considered unfortunate because all the worship the disciple had rendered to the Guru till that point has become fruitless." (Nārada Pañcharātra)

A true disciple waits for an order from their own Spiritual Master to honor or serve another Vaiṣṇava who is present with the Guru, and after receiving the order, while serving that Vaiṣṇava, a disciple does not ignore their own Spiritual Master or put the Guru in some discomfort. Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī states, *śrī gurur ājñāyā tat sevanāvirodhena ca anyeṣāṁ api vaiṣṇavānāṁ*

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sevanam śreyah anyathā doṣah syāt, yathā śrī nārada uktau: "It is auspicious for the disciple if the disciple, on the order of their own Spiritual Master, and without interfering with the service to him, serves the other respectable Vaiṣṇava. If one does not follow this rule, the disciple becomes a *guru-aparādhī* (an offender of the Guru)." (Bhakti-sandarbha-tīkā 714)

THE MANNER OF DEALING WITH ONE'S OWN GURU

*guruḥ pitā gurur mātā gurur devo gurur gatiḥ
śive ruṣṭe gurus trātā gurau ruṣṭe na kaścana*

"A bona-fide Spiritual Master is the real father and the real mother, includes all the demigods, and is the ultimate shelter of the disciple as well. If the all-auspicious Personality of Godhead somehow becomes disturbed or angry with a disciple, their pure Guru who is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures can deliver that disciple; but if their pure Guru somehow becomes unhappy or in some way becomes angry with the disciple then the disciple has no solace or shelter anywhere." (Kulārṇava-rahaṣya 12)

*gurum prakāśayate dhīmān mantram naiva prakāśayet
aprakāśa prakāśābhyām kṣiyante sampadāyuṣah*

"A wise person should always speak about and glorify their pure Guru but should never reveal the secret hymns received from the Guru. If one does not speak about how great the Guru is to others and invite them to see the Guru, but reveals the secret hymns received from the Guru to others, then the spiritual purity, prosperity, and the duration of life of the disciple become reduced." (Kulārṇava-rahaṣya 11)

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A real disciple always wants suffering souls to know about the authenticity of their Guru and invites people to ask questions and clear spiritual doubts from him. The Guru should be advertised but not the Gāyatrī mantras, because only an authorized Guru reveals them, not an unauthorized person. A disciple should never speak out to anyone about the Gāyatrī mantra received from Guru. Therefore, one should very carefully satisfy their pure Guru to attain liberation.

*gurus trivāram ācāram kathayec ca kuleśvarī
na gr̥hṇāti hi śiṣyaś cet tadā pāpam guror na hi*

Lord Śiva said, "O Goddess Durgā, if the Spiritual Master tells the disciple to do something three times in three different occasions, but the disciple does not follow that instruction and does not do the service, then there is no fault on the Guru's part but the disciple is implicated with offense and sin." (Kulārṇava-rahāṣya 11)

By following a pure Spiritual Master in disciplic succession, a disciple attains liberation. If the disciple is not serious even after receiving spiritual initiation and breaks spiritual principles, thinking, "I'll take birth as a human being in my next life anyway, and then I will become a serious devotee, now I want to enjoy," or "I will not receive liberation in this life anyway, so why should I worry about following spiritual life properly?" and thus acts frivolously, such a rascal disciple becomes a burden to the Guru. A disciple should very carefully follow the orders of the Guru if their Spiritual Master is a pure devotee. But if the Spiritual Master is not a transparent, pure devotee, and via-medium of God then the disciples he made certainly descend to taking lower births in their next life. Therefore, it is necessary for those disciples to find a Spiritual Master who is completely pure and perfect. If such a pure Spiritual Master is found then the science of self-realization

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automatically but gradually manifests in the heart of the disciples.

*idam eva param jñānam idam eva param tapah
idam eva param dhyānam idam eva parārcanam*

“Receiving the mercy of the Spiritual Master is the topmost knowledge for a disciple. Receiving the mercy of the Spiritual Master is the topmost austerity for a disciple, receiving the mercy of the Spiritual Master is the highest form of meditation for a disciple, and receiving the mercy from the Guru is certainly the highest form of worship for a disciple.” (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 3)

The Vedas further describe about the mercy of the Spiritual Master; that receiving his mercy is the greatest spiritual initiation, the greatest of all chanting, the seeing of the personified Lord, the greatest vow of all kinds, the greatest sacrifice, the path of liberation, the greatest among bestowers of spiritual results, the remedy that allows one to see the spiritual reality, the ultimate destination, and the topmost secret. Therefore it is the duty of a real disciple to always hanker to receive the mercy of a pure Spiritual Master.

POTENCY OF RECEIVING SPIRITUAL INITIATION FROM A SCRIPTURALLY AUTHORIZED GURU

*gataṁ sūdraśya sūdratvam vipraśyāpi ca vipratā
dikṣā saṁskāra sampanne jātibheda na vidyate
dvijo yo dīkṣitah paścād antyajah pūrva dīkṣitah
dvijah kaniṣṭha sa jyeṣṭha iti śāstrasya nirṇayah*

“After receiving spiritual initiation, the untouchability of a

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Śūdra and the Brāhmaṇa's birth pride become removed. After taking spiritual initiation from a pure devotee there remains no caste difference among disciples. If a Brāhmaṇa receives Vaiśnava initiation later than a low-born person, then the Brāhmaṇa is considered to be a junior disciple of the Guru. This is the scriptural conclusion." (Kulārṇava-ṛahasya, 14)

Connecting with a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master makes such a difference in one's life and not otherwise. One should therefore know that the true Spiritual Master is non-different from the Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who appeared in human form. Since no one can directly perceive the Supreme Lord, He appears before a sincere devotee in a human form as a Spiritual Master to liberate sincere devotees. One must understand that such a Spiritual Master is none other than Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, and that is why just by taking spiritual initiation from Him and living as a sincere devotee, one's misgivings automatically become completely removed. Lord Kṛṣṇa instructs a sincere devotee externally as their physical Guru and internally as their Supersoul. This is to help deliver the embodied soul from this material world. But, the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states, "Anyone who cannot deliver one's dependents from the cycle of repeated birth and death should never become their Spiritual Master, a father, a husband, a mother, or a worshipable demigod."

*divyam jñānam yato yadyāt kuryāt pāpasya sarikhyayam
tasmāt dīkṣeti sā proktā daiśikais tattva kovidaiḥ
ato gurum praṇamyaiva sarvasvam tat vinivedya ca
grhṇīyād vaiśnavam mantram dīkṣā purvam vidhānataḥ*

"Any function which systematically awards transcendental knowledge and frees one from sinful reactions is called the spiritual initiation process by the learned souls, who knew the Lord in truth. Therefore, after paying obeisance to the Spiritual Master and offering him everything that is owned, one should

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accept spiritual initiation from him with Vaiṣṇava mantras.” (Āgama-Śāstra)

ONLY THE MOST FORTUNATE SOULS OBTAIN A PURE GURU

*yathā kāñcanatāṁ yāti kānsya rasa visdhānataḥ
tathā dīkṣā vidhānena dvijatvāṁ jāyate nr̄ṇāṁ*

“Just as when bell metal and mercury are combined in an alchemical process, the bell metal turns into gold, similarly when a disciple is properly initiated by a perfectly pure and bona-fide Spiritual Master, a devotee’s attitude changes and the devotee turns into a twice-born.” (Tattva Sāgara)

A disciple should think about their Spiritual Master in the following way.

*kṛṣṇa yadi kṛpā kare kona bhāgyavāne
guru antaryāmi-rūpe sikhāya āpāne*

“Lord Kṛṣṇa is seated in everyone’s heart as their *chaitya-guru* (the Supersoul who functions as their Spiritual Master from within). When He is kind to a fortunate soul He mercifully appears as the external (physical) Spiritual Master to help guide the fortunate soul and personally gives instruction from within to accept the lessons given outwardly in the form of His external manifestation (as the physical Spiritual Master). In this way a disciple makes proper progress in devotional life.” (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Madhya 22.47)

*mātā pitā yuvatayas tanaya vibhūtiḥ
sarvāṁ yadeva niyamena madanu ayānāṁ*

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*ādyasya nah kula pater vakulābhirāmarī
śrīmad tadarīghri yugalaṁ praṇamāmī mūrdhṇī*

"I offer my obeisances with bowed head to the Lord's two lotus feet, who is the original Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and who is decorated with *bakūla* flowers. He is the caretaker of our entire disciplic succession and is the original Spiritual Master of the entire universe. He personally appeared as my Spiritual Master in this world, to whom I have dedicated my life to. He is everything for me, including my wife, my son, my wealth, my opulence, and my whole family. I pay my repeated obeisances at his lotus feet." (Ālabāndaru Stotra 7)

EXTERNAL SYMPTOMS OF A PURE GURU

A spiritual candidate who is searching for a true Guru is allowed to examine the prospective Guru before taking spiritual initiation from him. A candidate should find out if the Guru is pure from his previous life or not and if he is learned thoroughly in the Vedic scriptures or not. The symptoms of the Guru's purity from his previous life can be realized by knowing his present life. If the Guru was pure in his previous life he would take his present birth in a pure home where he learns Vedic life from his childhood and keeps his previous purity intact by not adopting vices. If the Guru's present background was not pure, then it should be understood that the Guru was not pure in his previous life. A pure Guru will not take his present birth in a home which teaches vices from childhood. A Guru must have a very minimum of two pure lives to take a spiritual seeker to the spiritual world. If the Guru himself is not sure about his liberation, then how can he help anyone else receive liberation? Therefore, one should search for a pure devotee to surrender to, but not by looking for

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his material qualifications and material allurements. One can never find a true Guru searching by material ways.

When a perfectly pure Guru who is learned in Vedic science is found, then a spiritual seeker should surrender to him by taking spiritual initiation. After taking spiritual initiation a disciple is not allowed to examine their Guru in any way. If any disciple examines or suspects their pure Guru in any way, they commit unforgivable offense and thus commit spiritual suicide. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states that everything a disciple has and everything that a disciple will obtain should be offered to their authentic Guru. A disciple should never listen to the criticisms of their Guru and never even speak ill about their Guru, nor criticize him in any way. A disciple should not honor another Vaiṣṇava before their Guru, nor should the disciple give any donation to anyone else except to their Guru. The Guru should always be glorified to others and should be served using mind, body, and wealth. Just to avoid bringing criticism to their Guru for not training the disciples properly, a disciple extends respect to the equal, superior, and senior Vaiṣṇavas. This is the Vedic standard of the Guru and disciple relationship.

Thus ends the Third Chapter of the Vrajavāsī Realization.

THE DISCIPLE



मनोरथरथमारुद्ध युक्तमिद्रिय वाजिभिः ।
भ्रमत्येव जगत्कृत्स्नं तृष्णा सारथिचोदितम् ॥४॥

*manoratha ratham āruḍha yuktam indriya vājibhiḥ
bhramatyeva jagat kṛtsnam trṣṇā sārathi coditam*

A human being, by riding on the chariot of the mind, which is drawn by uncontrolled horse-like senses driven by the charioteer of intense greed, moves in this world restlessly.

FINDING TIME TO SEARCH FOR TRUE GUIDANCE

One should keep control over one's mind because a person with an uncontrolled mind remains always restless due to constantly being bitten by the snake-like intense desire to enjoy material sense gratification and thus remains bereft of self-realization. Even such a person, by the mercy of a pure Spiritual Master, can become a wonderful devotee and go back to Godhead. The scriptures advise the following:

*uttīṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata
kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā
durgam̄ pathas tat kavayo vadanti*

"O human being, you have long been sleeping in the lap of ignorance. Now please wake up, become alert, and march forward to properly use your human birth by learning about higher awareness from the self-realized souls. Learning spiritual science is very mystical and intricate. It cannot be learnt without the merciful help of the learned pure transcendentalists. Learning spirituality without their help is as difficult as walking barefooted on a sharp razor's edge. The easiest solution to succeed on this path of spiritual realization can only be awarded by these saintly people because they possess it." (Kathopaniṣad 1.3.14)

Śrīpāda Śaṅkarāchārya says in his Bhaja-govindam prayers that in childhood everyone was attached to playing; in youth they became attached to the opposite gender; and in old age they became drowned in the pool of anxiety. In this way, hardly anyone has any time to learn about and become attached to spiritual life. Everyone desires to enjoy sense gratification because of prolonged association with Māyā (the external energy of the Lord) and thus has forgotten Lord Kṛṣṇa. Generally it is seen that hardly anyone cares about knowing the Supreme Lord. Seeing this situation, Māyā immediately grabs the mind of that person, and by stealing the intelligence, bewilders the person. Thus she makes the person act like a ghostly haunted entity. In this way, being covered by ignorance, a person becomes absorbed in material consciousness and forgets that they are a spirit soul and an eternal servant of God. In this condition, the person dives into the ocean of ignorance and wanders throughout the universe, for almost eternity. Sometimes the soul becomes a king, and sometimes a subject. Sometimes it takes birth as a Brāhmaṇa, and sometimes it takes birth as a Śūdra. Sometimes it becomes happy, and sometimes miserable. Sometimes it takes birth as a moth, or sometimes even lower than that. Sometimes it enjoys the heavenly planets, and sometimes it suffers in hell. Sometimes it becomes a demigod,

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and sometimes a demon. Sometimes it becomes a servant, and sometimes a master. That is how the living entity wanders throughout this universe under the jurisdiction of Māyā.

According to their performed karma, living entities wander and take different births throughout the entire universe. Some of them are being elevated to the upper planetary systems, and some are sent down into the lower planetary systems. Out of many millions who are wandering throughout the universe, a very fortunate living entity obtains an opportunity to associate with a perfectly pure and bona-fide Spiritual Master by the grace of God, Lord Kṛṣṇa. Then by the mercy of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Spiritual Master plants the seed of the devotional creeper in the heart of that fortunate person to proceed towards the spiritual world.

*nāyam ātmā pravacanena labhyo
na medhayā na bahunā śreṇīna
yam evaiśa vṛṇute tena labhyas
tasyaiśa ātmā vīvṛṇute tanum svām*

“One cannot attain the Supreme Lord just by expertly describing about Him, just by dint of vast intelligence used to present arguments about Him, or even by studying or listening to many scriptures about Him. He is attained, by His own choice, only by a person to whom He chooses to reveal Himself.”
(Kaṭhopaniṣad, 1.2.23, Muṇḍāka Upaniṣad 3.2.3)

*janan marañādi saṁsārānala-santaptā
diptā śirā jalaraśīm iva
upahāra pāñih śrotriyam brahma niṣṭham
gurum upāśṛtya tamānuśarati*

“When a person’s head becomes very hot or is on fire, that person goes to a reservoir of water to obtain help. Similarly,

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a person who burns in the fire of material existence of repeated birth and death should, with joined palms, humbly approach a perfectly realized Spiritual Master who is pure from birth and who is well-versed in the conclusions of the Vedic literatures, and strictly follow his instructions." (Vedānta-sāra)

*tad-vijñānārtham sa gurum evābhigacchet
samit pāñih śrotriyam brahma niṣṭham*

"To learn the science of transcendental devotional service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, a person seeking liberation should approach, with folded hands and total reverence, a self-realized śrotriya Brāhmaṇa Spiritual Master who is expert in knowing Vedic literatures and is fixed in direct devotional service to the Supreme Lord" (Muṇḍāka Upaniṣad 1.2.12).

The scriptures state that one must only accept a śrotriya Brāhmaṇa Vaiśnava Spiritual Master and no one else. Now one may ask what is a śrotriya Brāhmaṇa and how one reaches this stage? In answer to this the Manu Smṛuti states:

*janmanā brāhmaṇo jñeyah saṁskārād dvija ucyate
vidyayā yāti vipratvam tribhīḥ śrotriya śabda-bhāk*

"A person who is born in the unbroken tradition of the Brāhmaṇa dynasty to Brāhmaṇa parents is generally addressed as a Brāhmaṇa. When such a male child goes through the sacred thread ceremony he is called *dvija* (a twice-born), and when he becomes learned in the Vedic scriptures he is called *vipra* (a learned Brāhmaṇa). When he has met these three qualifications simultaneously, he is called a śrotriya Brāhmaṇa and only in this state is the Brāhmaṇa authorized to function as Spiritual Master for everyone."

QUALIFICATIONS AND DISQUALIFICATIONS OF A DISCIPLE

*vāg-brahma vādīnām vidyā caurātma prasānśakam
guna asahiṣnum ahitam ātmā krodhagam ambike
japa dhyānādi niratam sauκhyam ajñādi karikṣinām
kula śāstra priyam devī pṛthak śāstra parāṇimukham*

Lord Śiva said, "O Pārvatī, a candidate who poses to know Vedic philosophy but has no common sense, who is a thief, who glorifies himself, who cannot tolerate others' good qualities, who wants to harm others, and who is always angry is not qualified to become a disciple. On the other hand, one who chants *japa*, meditates on the Supreme Lord, who is always enthusiastic and charming, who always tries to follow the orders of his superiors, who feels pleasure in studying devotional scriptures and who avoids reading materialistic books—such a person is qualified to be a disciple." (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 13)

*śārīram arthaṁ prāṇāmaś ca sad gurubhyo nivedya yaḥ
gurubhyāḥ śikṣate yogam siṣya ity abhidhīyate*

"Anyone who offers their body, mind, money, and very life to a genuine Spiritual Master and humbly learns the transcendental process of spiritual life is called a disciple." (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 17)

Only after complete surrender to a pure Spiritual Master is one able to understand the Supreme Personality of Godhead properly. And only by the mercy of the Supreme Lord, by positive association with devotees, by execution of devotional service, and by knowledge of scriptures can one achieve a perfectly pure Spiritual Master. After millions of births, one achieves this valuable, but temporary, human birth. If one

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seriously takes to spiritual life now, one is able to become free from the cycle of birth and death. Sense gratification is available even to the animals, but a sincere human should endeavor to obtain a pure Spiritual Master and serve the Lord until one goes back to Godhead.

APPROACHING A QUALIFIED SPIRITUAL MASTER

*naiṣa tarkena matir āpaneyā prokta
anyena eva sujñānāya preṣṭhaḥ*

'A spiritual seeker should approach a bona-fide Spiritual Master to attain the topmost knowledge of the Absolute Truth, rather than misuse their intelligence and abilities to argue on material subjects and follow some false path.' (Kaṭhopaniṣad 1.2.9)

In the Vedic scriptures, there are no examples of persons who became self-realized without being initiated by a genuine Spiritual Master. A spiritually uninitiated person remains in illusion and also can put others in illusion. Spiritual initiation is the mercy of a pure Spiritual Master and it is understood to be beyond this world. One who sincerely follows the orders of a pure Spiritual Master and chants the prescribed rounds of *japa*, chanting the Lord's holy names on beads, becomes qualified to achieve His mercy.

*tasmād guru prasādena ūrdhva āmnāya narottamaḥ
yo vetti tatvato devī! sa me priyatamo bhavet*

Lord Śiva said, "O wife, by the mercy of the genuine Spiritual Master, a person attains spiritual elevation. Such a qualified devotee who speaks about the Supreme Lord in truth

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becomes very dear to me." (Kulārṇava-rahasya 3)

An inquisitive person should surrender to a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master who is well-versed in Vedic knowledge and extremely attached to devotional service. If one does not do so then one will not achieve realized knowledge. It is described in the Vedic literature that just as when bell metal and mercury are combined through following an alchemical process, the bell metal turns into gold, similarly when a disciple is properly initiated by a scripturally authorized Spiritual Master, a person turns into a twice-born devotee. But if someone ignores this system and remains spiritually uninitiated then anything the person does bears no results. As it is stated:

*adikṣitaśya vāmoru kṛtam sarva nirarthakam
paśu yonim avāpnoti dīkṣā-virahito janah*

"If a person is not properly initiated by a scripturally authorized Spiritual Master, all of their activities remain fruitless, and if that person dies without accepting spiritual initiation from a perfect Spiritual Master, then such a person descends into taking their next birth in the animal kingdom." (Viṣṇu-yamala)

By being initiated by a perfectly pure Spiritual Master, one attains Lord Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, every knowledgeable person should properly serve their perfectly pure Spiritual Master without hesitation. Those who are egoistic say, "I know better," and are unable to achieve a pure Guru. Such people remain uninitiated, and remain attached to sense gratification. Therefore, for them following the spiritual path is very difficult. Any person who has developed a serious desire to become free from material existence will surely take spiritual initiation from a bona-fide Spiritual Master. Vedic scriptures define the real standards of happiness and distress and if someone faithfully listens to or studies these scriptures, they know how to obtain lasting happiness in life. But unfaithful people remain careless

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about Vedic scriptures and thus receive no benefits from God. Those who are intelligent and pious become eager to know God and learn spirituality sincerely and thus attain lasting bliss. But those who are averse to the scriptures are like hunters who kill their own souls. Therefore, every civilized person is required to take to spiritual life under the guidance of a bona-fide Spiritual Master without fail.

*ato gurum praṇamyevāṁ sarvasvāṁ vinivedya ca
grhṇīyād vaiśnavāṁ mantrāṁ dīksā pūrvāṁ vidhānataḥ*

“Therefore, after properly paying obeisance to the Spiritual Master and offering him everything one possesses, one should accept mantra initiation from him following the rules of the Vaiśnava tradition.” (Viṣṇu-yamala)

Spiritual initiation awards one with transcendental knowledge and, at the same time, frees one from committed sins. This is the potency of transcendental knowledge and chanting the holy name of the Lord. That is why this process is called *divyam-jñānam kṣāpayati pradadatī*. As per the Vaiśnava rule, the first initiation can be given at any time of the year but, on the other hand, for the *pañcharātrikī* (spiritual initiation rewarded with mantras) initiation, the Spiritual Master must carefully choose an auspicious month, day and time for awarding it. According to the Skanda Purāṇa, the Kārtika month (October–November) is the best month for spiritual initiation, and Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday are the best days for this initiation.

THE PROCESS OF INITIATION WITH MANTRAS

paridhāyāniśuke śiṣya ācanto yāga maṇḍape

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gatvā bhaktyā gurum natvā guror āsīta daksine

"A prospective disciple should enter the sacrificial arena wearing clean clothes and a *chādar* (outer covering) and then purify their self by performing *āchamana* (sipping of holy water while chanting mantras) in the mood of devotion to the Supreme Lord. Then the prospective disciple should pay obeisance at the lotus feet of the Spiritual Master and sit down before him with joined palms, with the Spiritual Master facing the prospective disciple slightly to the Spiritual Master's right." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 2.127)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī writes in *Digdarśinī-tīkā*, "A prospective disciple, after bathing and dressing with clean clothes, according to their *āśrama* (married or unmarried), should take *āchamana* and apply *tilaka* (holy marks) properly on the assigned parts of the body according to the specific Vaiṣṇava tradition of the Guru. The prospective disciple should then be helped to put on neck-beads and a garland. Then, the candidate should again take *āchamana* and should pay obeisance again to the Spiritual Master while chanting his prayers. When the Spiritual Master has seen and tested the candidate for over several months, if the prospective disciple has developed a sufficient level of devotional attitude, the Spiritual Master initiates the disciple onto the spiritual path, thus freeing the disciple from past karma. This is called the process of opening of the transcendental vision. From that point on, the disciple perceives the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa through the eyes of the Spiritual Master and worships the Spiritual Master, offers donations, and sings his glories with musical instruments."

The process of giving donations and glorifying the Spiritual Master at the time of initiation is only the beginning. The disciple, throughout life, should continue to glorify the Spiritual Master and dedicate everything in his service.

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*avaiṣṇava upadiṣṭena mantreṇa nirayarī vrajet
tasmāc ca vidhinā samyag grāhayed vaiṣṇavād guroḥ*

"If one is initiated by a non-Vaiṣṇava (who wears *tilaka* sideways going from left to right or wears no *tilaka* at all on his forehead), then the initiated student is destined for hell at death. Consequently, one should follow scriptural injunctions and accept re-initiation from a Vaiṣṇava Guru with a Vaiṣṇava mantra." (Bhakti-sandarbha 717)

Anyone who is not initiated with Viṣṇu mantras is a non-devotee, whether he is functioning as a *Brahmachārī* (celibate student), a *Gṛhasthī* (householder), a *Vānaprasthī* (retired), or a *Sanyāsī* (renounced person). Such people are called *Māyāvādīs* who follow the impersonal path (advaita-matam). They think themselves to be one with God and thus do not accept initiation with Visnu mantras. Such people don't worship the Supreme Lord and thus, as per the Vedic scriptures, their end is bleak.

THE RESULTS OF HAVING A DIRTY HEART

*yāvat pāpaīs tu malinām hṛdayām tāvad eva hi
na Śāstre satya-buddhiḥ syāt sad-buddhiḥ sad-gurau tathā
aneka janma janita punya-rāśi phalaṁ mahat
sat-saṅga Śāstra śravaṇād eva prema ādi prajāyate*

"As long as one's heart is still dirty with grievous sins, one cannot seriously desire to study scriptures, nor can one genuinely love a bona-fide Spiritual Master. Only when one has acquired great merits for many, many births does a person develop a sincere desire to associate with saintly people and to genuinely hear the scriptures, by which love of Godhead can develop." (Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa)

ATTACHMENT TO DEVOTIONAL SERVICE

A sincere disciple, after taking spiritual initiation, becomes purified by following the instructions of the Spiritual Master. When the disciple executes devotional service regularly and chants the prescribed rounds of *japa* daily, then attachment to Lord Kṛṣṇa and to His devotional service becomes even more intense. A married person may be attached to their house, spouse, children, and possessions, but due to devotional practice, in due course of time, that person also becomes disgusted with material attachment. This means a devotee's devotion to the Lord always intensifies and attachment for the Lord never ends in distaste.

GUIDANCE OF A PROPER GURU

*sampṛṣṭvā vaiṣṇavān viprān viṣṇu śāstra viśāradān
cīrṇa vratān sadācārān taduktāṁ yatnataś caret*

"After asking for the advice of scripturally learned Brāhmaṇa Vaiṣṇavas who have followed the vows of austerities and the spiritual path for a long period of time, one should carefully follow their instructions because they have already become purified." (Kūrma Purāṇa)

*avijñāya vidhānoktāṁ hari-pūjā vidhi kriyāṁ
kurvan bhaktyā samāpnoti śata bhāgāṁ vidhānataḥ*

"After carefully learning about the spiritual process, if a disciple performs devotional service to please the Supreme Lord through the established correct process, even though done with

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devotion, if it was done without first receiving the permission of the Spiritual Master to do it, the disciple will obtain only one hundredth of the usual merit." (Viṣṇu-rahasya)

*yeśāṁ gurau ca jāpye ca viṣṇau ca paramātmānī
nāsti bhaktih sadā teṣāṁ vacanāṁ parivarjayet*

"If a disciple does not have a steady devotional attitude towards their own Spiritual Master, towards chanting *japa*, and towards the Supreme Personality of Godhead, it is not good to listen to that disciple and one should never accept any advice from that disciple." (Vaiṣṇava-tantra)

*bahvāśī dīrgha sūtrī ca viṣayādiṣu lolupāḥ
hetuvāda rato duṣṭo vāg-vādi guṇa nindakah
duṣṭa lakṣaṇa sampanno yadyapi svayamīśvaraḥ
bahu pratigraha āsakta ācāryaḥ śrī kṣayāvaha*

"A so-called Guru who always eats voraciously, who is very slow, who hankers for sense gratification, who has a habit of raising false arguments, who is vicious by nature, who always speaks foul language, who is habituated to speaking about the sins of others, who always criticizes the good qualities of others, whose character is very bad, who thinks he is God, who hankers for more money even when he has enough, such a person who may be acting as a Spiritual Master should not be accepted, because he will surely reduce one's spiritual advancement." (Tattva-sāgara)

According to Nārada Pañcharātra, if anyone is initiated by such an unqualified and impure Guru, then according to the scriptural process one must approach a bona-fide Vaiṣṇava Guru and take re-initiation from him.

yathā tathā yatra tatra na gṛhaṇīyāc ca kevalāṁ

*abhaktyā na guror nāma gr̥haṇīyāc ca yatātmavān
praṇavaḥ śrīs tato nāma viṣṇu śabdād anantaram
pāda śabda sametam ca natamūrdhnāñjalī yutah*

"A disciple should neither speak the name of their Spiritual Master freely everywhere and to everyone, nor should the disciple disrespectfully recite the name of the Guru, but if it is required to be told, then with joined palms and with bowed head in a humble state of mind, a disciple should recite their Spiritual Master's name, preceded with *Om Śrī* and followed by *viṣṇupāda paramahāṁsa parivrājakāchārya aṣṭottara śata Śrī Śrīmad* and then the Guru's name should be repeated." (Nārada Pañcharātra)

If a disciple knows that their Spiritual Master is bona-fide, is perfectly pure, and thoroughly learned, then a devotee should always glorify their Spiritual Master to everyone but should be very careful in their behavior about how to introduce the name of their Spiritual Master. This is because a disciple is seen as a representative of the Guru, and whatever criticisms come due to the disciple's behavior ultimately reflects upon the Guru. If the disciple is not up to the proper standard, then their improper actions and shortcomings may bring criticism to the Spiritual Master.

One should always be very careful to not become overly-familiar with the Spiritual Master. Familiarity breeds contempt. Given this, a disciple may feel and also deal with the Spiritual Master as if he is an ordinary man and thus commit offenses. To help the disciples and also others to develop and maintain a respectful attitude towards the Spiritual Master, the disciple should give a respectful title to the Spiritual Master, by using which the disciples should address their Spiritual Master—either while addressing him or while speaking about him. This is because even the relatively small offense of reciting the name of the Guru with an improper attitude can easily lead the disciple to

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commit serious *guru-aparādha* (offense against Guru) and destroy the disciple's devotional creeper. It is enjoined in the Vedic scriptures that if Lord Harī is displeased with a disciple, their true Spiritual Master can protect them, but if the Spiritual Master becomes displeased with the disciple then there is no shelter for that disciple. Therefore, a disciple should carefully endeavor to satisfy their worshipable Spiritual Master.

DISCIPLE MUST CAREFULLY OBEY THE GURU'S ORDERS

*ye gurv-ājñām na kurvanti pāpiṣṭhah puruṣādhamah
na teṣām naraka kleśa nistāro muni sattama*

"O best of the sages, any disciple who disobeys or avoids following the orders of their bona-fide Spiritual Master—that disciple is sinful and is the lowest of mankind and must suffer in hell, and there is no deliverance for that disciple." (Agastya Saṁhitā)

After accepting a bona-fide Spiritual Master, one should follow his orders without any hesitation or alteration. As Śrīla Vṛndāvana dāsa Ṭhākura writes, "One should follow the orders of their Spiritual Master without cutting a word from or adding a word to them." This is the Vedic standard. Śrīla Viśvanātha Chakravartī Ṭhākura while explaining a verse of the Bhagavad Gītā (2.41), points out that the order of the Spiritual Master is the life substance of the disciple." One should therefore never give up following a bona-fide Spiritual Master if he is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures to function as a Spiritual Master. One should never disrespect him in any way, or think of him to be an ordinary man. A Spiritual Master sometimes may act playfully or make jokes, still the disciple should not consider him to be an ordinary man but should think that the Spiritual Master

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may be testing their faith. As it is stated in the Padma Purāṇa, *guruṣu naramati yasya vā nārakī saḥ*: “Anyone who thinks that their scripturally authorized Spiritual Master is an ordinary man, that disciple has a hellish mentality.”

*śravaṇ gurau gurur eva ātmā jīvanam daivatam
nija sita daivata tayā abhimataś ca yaṣya tathā
bhūtaḥ san amāyāyā nirdambhayā, anuvṛtyā tad
ānugatya śikṣet mantra-gurus tu eka eva iti āha.*

“The success of human life is to dedicate oneself to hearing a perfect Spiritual Master who is a greatly honorable and divine person, and one should learn spirituality from him. By following the orders of a Spiritual Master who is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures, one will surely become disillusioned and free from false ego. If the Spiritual Master is scripturally authentic, then after taking spiritual initiation from him, a disciple should know that an initiating Spiritual Master can only be one. That is why one should be very careful while choosing the Spiritual Master for spiritual initiation.” (Bhakti-sandarbha-tikā 618)

*gurur yaṣya bhavet tuṣṭas tasya tuṣṭo hariḥ svayam
guroḥ samāsane naiva na caiva uccāsane vaseṭ*

Lord Brahmā said, “If the Spiritual Master is pleased with a disciple, then it must be understood that Lord Harī is pleased with that disciple. Without his order, a disciple should not sit on the seat or bed of their Spiritual Master nor sit on a seat which is as high as or is higher than his seat.” (Vāmana-kalpa)

This means that when one’s authentic Spiritual Master becomes pleased with their service then one should understand that Lord Kṛṣṇa has accepted their service. Pleasing of Lord Kṛṣṇa depends on the satisfaction of one’s own pure Guru.

ATTITUDE OF A DISCIPLE

*śrīnāthadeva svāmī iti vivāde sādhane vadet
śrī guroḥ pādukāṁ devī mūlamantrāṁ svapādukāṁ
gururūṁ prakāśayate dhīmān mantrāṁ naiva prakāśayet
aprakāśa prakāśābhyāṁ kṣiyante sampad āyuṣah*

“At the time of discussion or at the time of prayers (such as in the *jaya om viṣṇupāda* prayer chanted just after the *kīrtana*), the disciple should recite the Spiritual Master’s name along with *śrī*, and end with *mahārāja* or *swāmī* after the Guru’s name. A disciple should make their goal of life to follow in the Guru’s footsteps but should never imitate him. An intelligent disciple should always broadcast the glories of their pure Spiritual Master but should never reveal the secrets received from him. If the disciple keeps the Spiritual Master secret and does not advertise about him but reveals the secret mantras received from him, then the spiritual purity and duration of life of that disciple will surely be reduced.” (Kulārṇava-rahasya 11)

*gurv arthaṁ dhārayed dehaṁ
gurv arthaṁ dhanam arjayet
nija prāṇān parityajya
guru kāryāṁ samācaret
gurv agre na tapah kuryān na upavāsādikāṁ vrataṁ
tīrtha yātrāṁ na kuryāc ca na snāyād ātma śuddhaye*

“A disciple should keep their body fit just to serve their Spiritual Master and should earn money just to give it to him. Even at the cost of their own life, a disciple should continue serving the Spiritual Master. A disciple should not perform any austerities, take vows of fasting, visit holy places of pilgrimage,

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or bathe in holy waters for purification if such acts become a hindrance to the regular service of the Spiritual Master.” (Kulārṇava-rahaṣya 12)

At no time or in no circumstance should a disciple argue with their Guru if they know that their Guru is properly bona-fide and authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures. If a disciple argues with such a Guru then what happens to that disciple is stated in the Mahābhārat:

*guroh parivadad kharo bhavati sva vai bhavati nindakah
paribhokta krmir bhavati kito bhavati matsari*

“By arguing with their bona-fide Guru, a disciple takes their next birth as a donkey; if the disciple criticizes an authentic Guru then the disciple takes their next birth as a dog; if a disciple does not regularly offer the share from their earning, but enjoys it without giving a portion to the Guru then the disciple takes their next birth as a worm; and if the disciple envies the Guru or becomes angry with the Guru then that disciple takes their next birth as a moth.”

This verse shows the pathway to the disciple about how to avoid offenses and keep their purity properly intact. If the disciple has one-pointed intelligence then such a disciple will deal with an authentic Spiritual Master very carefully. It is said that in the presence of the Spiritual Master a disciple should not even honor another elevated Vaiṣṇava (like the Guru’s godbrother) if that interferes with the service to their own Spiritual Master. If a disciple does not follow this rule then their service will become fruitless. A disciple should always follow the orders of the Spiritual Master and never disobey him in any way. A disciple should always satisfy the Spiritual Master using their intelligence by properly serving him because any service done for the Guru will bring the mercy of Lord Kṛṣṇa. A disciple should not make friendship or associate with non-believers.

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*gurūktānukta kāryyeṣu na upekṣā kārayet priye
śirasā yad gurur brūyāt tatkāryyam avicārataḥ
gacchan tiṣṭhan svapan jāgrat japan juhvat prapūjayan
guru ājñām eva kurvīta tad gatenāntarātmanā*

Lord Śiva said, "O dear wife, a disciple should not be indifferent to what the Spiritual Master tells them to do or not to do—they simply must follow. The disciple should simply dedicate their life to following the orders of their Spiritual Master. While walking, while sitting, while sleeping, while awake, while chanting, while performing sacrifice, or while worshiping, a disciple should follow the orders of their bona-fide Spiritual Master and always think of Guru within the heart." (Kulārṇava-rahaṣya 12)

By serving an authentic Spiritual Master, the disciple evaporates their sins and increases their merits and achieves success in all activities. The disciple should honor even the shoes of their Spiritual Master, and when chanting *japa*, a disciple should pray to the Spiritual Master at the end of each round of *japa*. In each and every activity that is performed, the disciple should remember the orders of the Spiritual Master.

*na gacched agratas tasya na vased utthite gurau
śaktic chāyāṁ surac chāyāṁ guruc chāyāṁ na laṅghayet
ekāsane na upavised guruṇā tat samaiḥ saha
na vaśed āsane devī devatā guru sannidhau*

Lord Śiva said, "The disciple should not walk in front of the Guru unless told by the Guru, nor should the disciple sit when the Spiritual Master is standing or stands up. A disciple should not cross over the shadow of the Spiritual Master, a goddess, a demigod or God. A disciple should not sit on the same seat or sleep on the same bed of their Guru or sit as high as the Guru unless ordered by the Guru. A devotee should not

sit immediately next to a demigod or next to the Spiritual Master." (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 12)

For one who is not yet spiritually initiated, for that devotee becoming disillusioned means to determine who is a bona-fide Guru and who is not. And for that devotee, becoming free from false ego means to understand their insignificant position in relation to a bona-fide Guru and thus become humble and act submissively. One must develop these qualities before accepting spiritual initiation. That is why there is a training period while waiting for spiritual initiation as a candidate. After having been initiated, a disciple should continue to perform devotional service under the guidance of their bona-fide Guru. In this way, a disciple gradually becomes pure and goes back to Godhead.

THE RESULT OF SERVING A PURE GURU

*yathā khaṇan khaṇitreṇa naro vāpādhigachati
tathā guru gatām vidyā śuśruṣur adhigacchati*

"Just as by continuously digging a hole in the ground with a shovel, one obtains water, similarly by continuously serving their bona-fide Spiritual Master, a serious disciple attains realized knowledge." (Manu Smṛuti 2.218)

A disciple automatically receives transcendental knowledge from their pure Spiritual Master if their service pleases him. Favorable and desired service rendered submissively with a devotional attitude surely pleases the Guru. But if a disciple tries to learn transcendental knowledge without serving their Spiritual Master, they are actually doing a great disservice to their own self because this is considered to be knowingly breaking Vedic law. That is why it is stated in the

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Muṇḍāka Upaniṣad, *tad vijñānārthaṁ sa gurum evābhigacchet*. This means that the disciple derives no spiritual benefit from their service to the Spiritual Master. Since the purpose of human life is to advance spiritually and also go back to Godhead, any activity that does not reward spiritual advancement is actually a waste of time and therefore detrimental to the mission of human life.

For a dedicated disciple, the Guru is the topmost place of pilgrimage. Just as one visits places of pilgrimage to become purified, similarly by serving the Guru, a disciple becomes purified and cuts the material bondage to birth and death.

*abhimāno na kartavya jāti vidyā dhanādibhiḥ
sadā ca nivaśen nityam śiṣyāḥ śrī guru sannidhau
sāmānyato niṣedhañca sad guro yadi sannidhau
ācaret tasya sarvasya doṣāḥ koṭi-guṇo bhavet*

"A disciple should never become proud of their birth in a high caste, for their good education, or of their abundant wealth, but should humbly and continuously serve their Spiritual Master and always follow his orders. If the bona-fide Spiritual Master is near you, and if there is any fault in your actions and you do not correct them but continue acting faultily then you become millions of times more faulty in the eyes of God." (Kulārṇava-rahasya 12)

*guror yatrārvādo nindā vāpi pravartate
karṇo tatrāpi dhātavyau gantavyam vā tato'nyathā*

"If a disciple knows that their Spiritual Master is perfectly authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures to act as an initiating Guru, then the disciple should never hear any criticism of their Guru. But if someone in some place hears the criticism of their

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Guru then that disciple should close their ears and leave that place immediately." (Manu Smruti 2.200)

IMPROPER SERVICE TO THE SPIRITUAL MASTER

*na abhinandati tad vākyām uttarām sāmpra yacchati
guru karmāṇi sādhye ca tad upekṣām karoti ca*

"If a disciple does not honor the words of the Spiritual Master but talks back to him, then such a disciple is actually ignoring the Guru and, even if that disciple renders a lot of practical service to the Guru, that disciple receives no results from it." (Padma Purāṇa, Bhūmi khaṇḍa 67.44)

If the Spiritual Master instructs the disciple to do some service, and the disciple, hesitates or does not want to do it, or yells at the Spiritual Master, "All right, I'll do it!" and proceeds to do that service but in an angry mood, even if the service was done as per the Vedic scriptures, that disciple receives no benefit from that service and actually receives the result of ignoring the Spiritual Master. This means if the disciple does the service begrudgingly, the disciple receives no spiritual results because such a dealing of a disciple is actually called ignoring the Guru. Therefore, the actions of such a person are like one who waters a plant and digs it up at the same time.

*deva drohām na kurvīta guru drohām tathaiva ca
deva drohād guru drohāḥ koṭi koṭi gunādhikāḥ*

"A disciple should never rebel, envy, or oppose the Supreme Lord or their scripturally authentic Spiritual Master. Being malicious towards such a bona-fide Spiritual Master gives millions of times of a worse result than malice against the

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Supreme Lord." (Padma Purāṇa, Svarga-khaṇḍa 55.15)

*nakuryān mānaśām vipro guros tyāge kathañcana
mohād vā yadi vā lobhāt tyaktvā tu patito bhavet*

"No disciple should reject their own bona-fide Spiritual Master under any circumstances, not even within the mind. If, due to illusion, madness, or greed, a disciple rejects their true Spiritual Master and leaves the Guru, then such a disciple is called spiritually fallen." (Padma Purāṇa, Svarga-khaṇḍa 53.23)

PERSONAL ASSOCIATION OF SAINTLY PERSON

*sadā śānto 'bhigantavya adyāpy upadisānti na
yā hi svaira kathā teṣām upadeśa bhavanti te*

"Anyone who is interested in their soul's elevation after their departure from this world should always associate with a pure devotee even if that devotee does not preach openly. But, by chance, if that devotee speaks something spontaneously, that talk in itself may include a great instruction for one's emancipation." (Yoga-vāsiṣṭha)

A pure devotee is very rare in this world, even among liberated souls. Just by being near a pure devotee, even for a short time, one naturally develops a taste for serving Lord Kṛṣṇa. Simply seeing, touching, speaking with, or serving a pure devotee in any way rewards one with purification. The Spiritual Master's personal association is like nectar that is not contaminated by poison. The poet Tulasī dāsa states, *muda marīgala maya sarita samājū*: "Just by associating with a pure devotee, one's life becomes joyful and auspicious." Sanat-kumāra says to Nārada Muni in the Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa, "O

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son of Lord Brahmā (Nārada), if any person desires to please Lord Śrī Hari, they should understand that the only solution to this world of suffering is to associate with a pure devotee." But such an association is only available to those who are lucky and have acquired unlimited merits in their previous lives.

A disciple should always aspire to accelerate the rate of their purification. The best ways to do this are to increase the chanting of *japa*, perform service to Guru, serve in the temple, observe the Ekādaśī fast, study Vedic scriptures, and be in the association of devotees. A disciple should not rely only on the scriptures, but should also consult with a pure Spiritual Master who is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures so the path which is being followed is learnt to perfection. If followed in this way, the spiritual actions yield perfect spiritual results.

If the bona-fide Spiritual Master is physically present, then his orders are the ultimate authority for his disciples. But if the guru is not authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures to function as a Spiritual Master then that spiritual master is not considered to be perfect and thus his disciples cannot expect any tangible benefit from their spiritual activities. Therefore, a spiritually inclined person must be very careful about whom to surrender to in spiritual life. A materially attached disciple cannot be convinced by a materialistic spiritual master to follow the spiritual processes of purification, because the spiritual master himself is scripturally inauthentic. Their connection is just like a handcuffed person who reaches another handcuffed person to become free.

THE MERCY OF THE SPIRITUAL MASTER

*tasya darśana mātreṇa svapaco'pi vimucyate
brāhmaṇo vā antyajo vāpi śucir vāpy athavā 'śuciḥ*

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*parā prasāda jāpī yaḥ sa mukto nātra sanśayah
gacchatas tiṣṭhato vāpi jāgrataḥ svapato'pi vā*

"Whether one is a pure Brāhmaṇa, an untouchable person, or even a low-born outcaste; or whether one is clean or unclean; one surely obtains purification by regularly visiting a pure Spiritual Master. Therefore, one who even hankers to visit such a Spiritual Master obtains the transcendental mercy of the Spiritual Master. Such a person undoubtedly receives liberation in all situations, whether departing from this world while walking, standing, while awake, or while asleep." (Kulārṇava-rahāṣya 3)

How one should go to visit a pure Spiritual Master is personally stated by Lord Paraśurāma to Bhīṣmadeva in the Mahābhārat:

*rikta hastaś ca na upeyad rajānam devatām gurum
phala puṣpa ambara kalpair yathā śaktyāsamārccayet*

"One should never go empty handed to visit a king, a demigod, or a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master. According to one's means, one should take some fruits, flowers, cloth, or sweets with them to offer." (Kulārṇava-rahāṣya 12)

A disciple should always meditate on their Spiritual Master as if he is showering his mercy upon the disciple. Anyone who has the mercy of their Spiritual Master becomes the knower of spiritual knowledge because it is understood that the mercy of a pure Spiritual Master is superior to Lord Kṛṣṇa's mercy. Only by the mercy of a pure and self-realized Spiritual Master can one automatically understand everything spiritual. Without being authorized by the pure Guru, one cannot become a Vaiśnava or even become steady in Kṛṣṇa conscious. One has to have the mercy of a pure devotee to be spiritually successful and this is the actual secret.

*IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES A DISCIPLE MUST BE
FAVORABLE TO GURU*

*guro hitam hi kartavyam mano vāk kāya karmabhiḥ
ahitācaranād devī viṣṭhāyām jāyate kṛmiḥ
guru tyāgāt bhaved mṛtyur mantra tyāgād daridratā
guru mantra parityāgād rauravam narakam vrajet*

"A disciple should always assist their Spiritual Master by using their mind, body, and words. By becoming an obstruction to the Spiritual Master, after death that disciple becomes a worm in stool. By rejecting the qualified Spiritual Master, a disciple brings spiritual death, and by rejecting the mantra given by the Guru, a disciple becomes spiritually stagnant. But if a disciple rejects both the Spiritual Master and his given mantra, then that disciple falls into the most ferocious (Raurava) hell." (Kulārṇava-rahasya 12)

To become fixed and to have proper consciousness, a disciple should always be alert in avoiding material connections. Therefore, even while going to sleep, a disciple should pray to Lord Kṛṣṇa for His protection so as to serve Him. One of the secrets of spiritual life is that a devotee should wake up in the early morning and after taking a bath and worshipping Lord Kṛṣṇa, the devotee should chant *japa*. In the *Baihāyasapāñcharātra* it is stated that a devotee should divide the whole night into five parts, and in the last part the devotee should wake up, and after becoming clean, should perform spiritual life, including chanting (*japa*) meditation. For this reason, the last part of the night is called the *brahma-muhūrta* (the auspicious time for pleasing God).

bodhaḥ kaluṣitas tena daurātmyam prakatīkṛtaṁ

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gurur yena parityaktas tena tyaktāḥ purā hariḥ

"If a disciple deprives, cheats, or talks ill about their scripturally authorized Guru or envies the Guru in any way, then that disciple becomes implicated with unforgivable sin. If a disciple even considers giving up their virtuous and bona-fide Guru, that disciple has already been given up by Lord Śrī Hari." (Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa)

The Vedic scriptures state that only a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master is empowered by the Supreme Lord to guide the sincere people to the spiritual world. Therefore, to understand the science of self-realization, one must take shelter at the lotus feet of a bona-fide Spiritual Master, because only he can open the transcendental vision of one so as to see God. According to the Taittiriya Upaniṣad, a bona-fide Spiritual Master represents the original God, *ācāryaḥ pūrva rūpam*. Therefore, one should humbly serve the Spiritual Master and should never criticize him in any way. Unless one is blessed by a bona-fide Spiritual Master, the intricate teachings of Lord Kṛṣṇa cannot be successfully understood. Therefore, a disciple should seek the mercy of a pure Spiritual Master so as to develop from within spiritually. Anyone initiated by an inauthentic guru not qualified by the injunctions of the ancient Vedic scriptures should take another spiritual initiation from a pure Vaiśnava who is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures to function as Guru. This is the Vedic rule established by God for spirituality.

HOW TO ATTAIN LIBERATION

*dīkṣā matreṇa kṛṣṇasya nara mokṣāṁ labhanti vai
kim punar ye sadā bhaktyā pūjayanty acyutāṁ naraḥ*

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Lord Śiva said to Pārvatī, "Just by being initiated by a pure devotee with the Mahāmantra of Lord Kṛṣṇa, a person proceeds towards liberation, what to speak of a person who also worships the infallible Lord regularly with devotion along with the chanting of His holy names. Such a devotee surely receives liberation." (Skanda Purāṇa)

A genuine Vaiṣṇava Spiritual Master, while awarding spiritual initiation to a disciple, makes them take strict vows of no illicit sex, no meat eating, no intoxication, no gambling, etc., with the fire as its witness. By keeping this vow, the disciple develops many wonderful realizations for further advancement. A scripturally authorized Spiritual Master, while rewarding spiritual initiation, acts as a transcendental magnet, thereby removing the iron-like sins from that disciple. Such a Spiritual Master must be served unconditionally at all times so he remains pleased. As per the scriptural rules anything the Guru says a disciple must do without a doubt. As it is stated:

*guru-talpaṁ hi gurv artham na dūṣayati mānavam
steyam kurvamīś ca gurv artham āpatsu na niśidhyate*

"Following the order of the Spiritual Master, if a disciple sleeps on his Guru's bed it does not contaminate the disciple if doing so satisfies the Spiritual Master. If the Spiritual Master is in some financial difficulty, seeing which if a disciple makes money using some spiritually undesirable means without breaking the state laws with a motive to remove the problem of the Guru then that act also does not implicate a disciple with sin." (Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva 34.23)

A disciple should never think serving the Spiritual Master is a dirty job, but should think it is spiritually elevating instead. If Guru is pure then a disciple should never doubt his actions in any way. The Guru never asks anything which would contaminate anyone and that is the proof that he is a pure

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devotee. His position is like a large smokeless fire that can burn anything supplied to it and remains uncontaminated. How actions of a devotee are justified is stated in the following way:

*prāṇa-trāṇe'nṛtam vācyam ātman eva parasya ca
gurv-arthe strīṣu caiva syād vivāha karaṇeṣu ca*

"Just to save one's own life or to save the life of someone else, or just to protect their Guru's life or just to protect their Guru's dignity, while joking with the wife in a solitary place, or while dealing with marrying off one's own child, telling lies on these occasions does not implicate one with sin." (Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva 34.25)

Thus ends the Fourth Chapter of the Vrajavāsī Realization.

ETIQUETTE AND AUSTERITIES



गुरोरगे पृथक्पूजां अद्वैतं च परित्यजेत् ।
दीक्षां व्याख्यां प्रभुत्वं च गुरोरगे विवर्जयेत् ॥४॥

*guror agre pr̄thak pūjām̄ advaitam̄ ca parityajet
dīkṣām̄ vyākṣām̄ prabhuṭvam̄ ca guror agre vivarjayet*

A disciple should not worship another devotee in the presence of his own Guru even if that devotee is senior to him. A disciple should never think or say that there is no difference between him and his Guru. He should never accept his own worship or give spiritual initiation to anyone if his Guru is still alive. He should neither demonstrate his own abilities nor give lectures in the presence of the Guru (unless Guru asked).

RESPECTING THE SPIRITUAL MASTER

Sometimes it is seen that a devotee becomes envious of a more qualified devotee. This is a sign of being a neophyte. Generally, if the devotee is spiritually advanced, then instead of becoming envious of a more qualified devotee, one should become happy by seeing a more qualified devotee so as to learn something more. Such an attitude comes to a disciple if the disciple has a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master. Such an

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authentic Spiritual Master is not ordinary; as the scriptures state, *guruḥ asādhāraṇa puruṣaḥ*, "The scripturally authentic Guru is not from this world. That is why he is an extraordinary personality." Near such a Spiritual Master, a disciple must meticulously observe proper etiquette because such a Guru is *sāksāt-hari* (directly Lord Kṛṣṇa in human form). What to speak of spiritually initiating others, giving elegant lectures, or demonstrating his own abilities, a disciple should not even speak loudly in front of the Spiritual Master. The standard is that only by the order of the Spiritual Master can a disciple give a lecture in front of him. And even if the disciple feels qualified, still he should not initiate anyone if the Guru is physically alive.

*yatra tatra gurum paśyed tatra tatra kṛtañjalī¹
prāṇamet dāṇḍvad bhūmau cchinna mūla ivā drumah*

Nārada Muni says, "As soon as a disciple sees their Spiritual Master, immediately they should fold their hands and pay an obeisance, touching the head to the ground in a humble state of mind." (Devī-āgama)

Unlike other forms of life, the human birth is accompanied by great responsibility. Vedic civilization demands much more from a civilized human being than from an animal, which spends all its time eating, sleeping, mating, and defending. Unless one is able to responsibly control the demands of the senses, one should not take spiritual initiation from a scripturally bona-fide Spiritual Master, because such an initiated disciple cannot please the Supreme Lord. The initiation process begins when one stops sinful activities and executes favorable devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa under the guidance of a magnanimous Guru. After becoming initiated by a pure Spiritual Master, a disciple should not recite the name of the Spiritual Master unless it is necessary. If it is necessary, a disciple should recite the Guru's name with joined palms and bowed head,

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beginning with *Om Viṣṇupāda*, etc. As it is stated, *gurūṁ praṇamya parikīrtayet nāma*, "Only after paying heartfelt respects within the heart can a disciple reverentially recite the name of their Guru."

One may question, if one needs to please the Supreme Lord with devotion then what is the need for one to be initiated by a Spiritual Master? The answer is that to understand the proper worship procedures and to receive the full effect of mantras, one needs the help of a Spiritual Master. Just as knowledge of medicine is available in books, still one requires a professor to become a doctor. Similarly, to become spiritually self-realized, a disciple requires a professor-like scripturally authentic Spiritual Master. When a disciple hears the Spiritual Master pronounce the mantras with his own lips, then the chanting of mantras becomes one hundred times more effective for the disciple.

RESPECTING SPIRITUALIZED PARAPHERNALIA

*prāptam ayatanād viṣṇoḥ śirasā praṇato vahet
nikṣipet ambhasi tato na patet avanau yathā*

"If one obtains a garland used by Lord Viṣṇu, one should wear it around the neck with full respect. Thereafter, it should be put in the water but should not be buried or thrown on the ground where people may tread on it." (Nārada Pañcharātra)

The leftovers of the Lord are His mercy and accepting them as His mercy will increase one's health, duration of life, wealth, prestige, good fortune, purity; will remove accidental death, and will bring one victory and ultimately liberation. If one indiscriminately throws out such pure items without considering their importance then, according to the *Digdarśinī-tīkā*, one

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should atone for it by chanting 108 names of Lord Kṛṣṇa. For this reason one should not give such items to a person who cannot appreciate its spiritual nature. This rule applies particularly to all the articles that are used by the Lord. But the food that has been offered to Him can be given to any living being to purify them. Therefore, one should carefully handle the mercy received from the Lord and from one's pure Spiritual Master in the form of leftover items.

GIVING UP THE ASSOCIATION OF ENVIOUS PEOPLE

*yaiḥ kṛta ca guro nindā vibho śāstrasya nārada
nāpi taiḥ saha vaktavyam vaktavyam vā kathañcana*

Lord Brahma said, "O Nārada, under no circumstance should one associate or converse with a person who criticizes their pure Spiritual Master, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, or the Vedic literatures." (Nārada Pañcharātra)

The nature of a person who is not Kṛṣṇa conscious is to criticize devotees. For such a person, the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness makes very little sense. The Spiritual Master and Vedic scriptures remind the living entities why they are suffering. The Supreme Lord, in His deity form, accepts the service of everyone to purify their sins so they can become free from suffering. Therefore, one should not associate with those who criticize the Supreme Lord, the Spiritual Master, or the Vedic literatures. The Sammohana-tantra states that a disciple should not even reveal one's own worshipable deity, the name of the Spiritual Master, the Gāyatrī mantras, or their own chanting beads (*japa-mālā*) because non-devotees might criticize these spiritual paraphernalia. This would be detrimental to a devotee's spiritual advancement and would hurt the critic as well.

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*varaṁ hutāvaha jvālā pañjarāntara vyavasthitih
na śauri cintā vimukha jana saṁvāsa vaiśasam*

"One should rather tolerate being locked in a fiery cage than to associate with non-devotees who find faults in everything spiritual." (Kātyāyana Smṛti)

Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu said, *asat saṅga tyāga, Śrī bhāgavata śravaṇa*: "A devotee should give up the association of non-devotees and regularly listen to the recitation of Śrimad Bhāgavatam in the association of devotees." Here the main point is that one should always stay away from unholy association. This is the sum and substance of a devotee's etiquette. Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī also states, *saṅga tyāgāt sato vṛtteḥ*, "A serious devotee should abandon associating with non-devotees and should follow the instructions of previous spiritual authorities to have spiritual success. The association of non-devotees is considered even worse than a red-hot iron cage because the red-hot iron cage will burn and kill only once, but the rascals' connection will give anxiety all the time, with no relief by death. Lord Kapiladeva says to His mother, Devahūti, "One should not associate with a person who is bereft of spiritual knowledge about self-realization."

A DEVOTEE RESPECTS EVERYONE

*na nindet brāhmaṇān devān viṣṇum brāhmaṇam eva ca
rudram ādityam agnīm ca lokapālān grahāns tathā
vandet vaisṇavān cāpi puruṣām pūrva dīkṣitām*

"Rather than criticize, one should extend respects to a Brāhmaṇa, the demigods, the Personality of Godhead Lord Viṣṇu, Lord Brahmā, Lord Śiva, the sun-god, the fire-god, the

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presiding deities of the directions, the nine planets, and the devotees who are already initiated by a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master.” (Varāha Purāṇa)

Those who are surrendered devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa automatically develop the saintly qualities of friendliness and aversion to faultfinding. These people do not dedicate themselves to anyone else other than Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. They respect all the divine people, such as the demigods, and do not criticize them in any way. According to Vaiśnava philosophy, a devotee should respect even an ant, what to speak of exalted persons like Lord Śiva, Lord Brahmā, or other demigods.

*utsarga vai puriśasya mūtrasya ca visarjana
nidhāya daksiṇe karṇe brahmaśūtrah udarāg mukhaḥ*

“A twice-born person should wrap his sacred thread around his right ear before going to evacuate or urinate and, if possible, face north.” (Viṣṇu Purāṇa)

The reason for wrapping the sacred thread on the right ear is to keep the right ear pure for further spiritual functions. As spiritual etiquette, a Brāhmaṇa devotee wraps his right ear with his Brāhmaṇa thread before entering into an impure area. What to speak of spiritual etiquette, a Vaiśnava is even careful about social actions. A Vaiśnava does not even disturb any living entity. Thus, by following all Vedic instructions, a devotee’s life becomes sublime. This means the character and behavior of such a devotee remains perfect, and such a devotee receives guidance from the Supersoul, who is seated in the heart. Such a devotee is guided to a pure Spiritual Master in order to accept initiation from him.

*tatra udicyāṁ diśi maunī yajñā sūtrāṇi karṇayoh
krītvā upaviṣṭah prājñastu mala-mūtra visarjayed*

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Śrīla Vyāsadeva says, “A twice-born Brāhmaṇa should wrap his right ear with his Brāhmaṇa thread before going to urinate or evacuate and, if possible, squat down facing north.” (Kriyā-yoga-sāra)

This instruction is for twice-born Brāhmaṇas who already have the Brāhmaṇa’s thread. Whenever or wherever they go to urinate or evacuate, they must wrap their thread clockwise at least one time around the right ear. The reason for this is that spiritual mantra initiation is received through the right ear. To keep the right ear free from contamination, the Vedic scriptures state for him to wrap it with the thread of transcendence. It is important for him to replace his thread for any of the following reasons: if he ignored or forgot the rule of wrapping the thread around the right ear before urinating or evacuating, if even one strand of the Brāhmaṇa thread breaks, if the knot of the Brāhmaṇa thread is opened up, if he attends a funeral ceremony, if he is touched by a lady who has given birth to a baby within twenty days, if he touched or got touched by a lady who is passing through her menstrual period, if he touched any of her possessions during that period, or at the end of each eclipse. In all of these circumstances, both his body and the sacred thread become contaminated. Therefore, he must bathe and dress in clean clothes before wearing the new thread. There are mantras to change the Brāhmaṇa thread and the Guru teaches them to one who becomes qualified. A Brāhmaṇa devotee should always keep his thread brightly clean and pure so the Lord can accept his worship.

THE PROPER WAY TO VISIT HOLY PLACES

*govardhana girau ramiye rādhākuṇḍam priyam hareḥ
kārtike bahulāṣṭamyaṁ tatra snātvā hareḥ priyah*

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naro bhakto bhaved vipras taddhi tasya pratoṣanam

"Rādhākuṇḍa (the lake of Rādhārāṇī) is situated at the foot of the honorable Govardhana Hill. Rādhākuṇḍa is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa. One who takes a bath in it on the night of the eighth day of the waning moon (dark fortnight) of Kārtika, called Bahulāṣṭāmī, pleases Lord Kṛṣṇa and becomes dear to Him." (Padma Purāṇa)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī states in his *Digdarśinī-tīkā* that it is true that by taking a bath in Rādhākuṇḍa, one becomes dear to Lord Hari. If one is not near Rādhākuṇḍa and takes a bath just to please the Lord, then taking a bath or a shower anywhere will satisfy the Lord as well. But the intention of pleasing Lord Harī must be there in the heart to obtain the proper result.

*Śrī krṣṇa dāsa varyo'yaṁ śrī govardhana bhūdharaḥ
śukla pratipadī prātaḥ kārtike'rcyū 'tra vaiṣṇavaīḥ*

"In the morning of the first day (annakūṭa day) of the light fortnight of the month of Kārtika, a Vaiṣṇava must worship Govardhana Hill, because it is the topmost servant of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa." (Skanda Purāṇa)

The process of worshiping Govardhana should be followed as it is described in the *Śrimad Bhāgavatam* (10.21.18). Govardhana is described by Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī in the *Bhaktirasāṁṛta-sindhu* as being better than Vṛindāban. Anyone who resides in the Mathurā area in the month of Kārtika and worships and circumambulates Govardhana Hill goes to the abode of Lord Śrī Harī and remains there happily.

One should bathe in the holy Rādhākuṇḍa, Yamunā, Ganges, and other holy bodies of water with great respect. One should not swim or play in such holy waters because they relate to Lord Kṛṣṇa. The *Agni Purāṇa* states that the Yamunā flows in

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the spiritual world eternally where Lord Kṛṣṇa sports in its waters daily. Swimming means kicking with the feet. That is why swimming is forbidden in the holy waters for the Vaiṣṇavas.

*guroḥ pādoudakam̄ putra tīrtha koṭi phala pradām̄
tasya bhāgīrathī snānam ahany ahani jāyate*

Lord Brahmā said, "O son Nārada, the water which washed the feet of the pure Spiritual Master is equal to the water of ten million places of pilgrimage and if one touches it to their head, it gives one equal merit to regularly bathing in the holy river Ganges." (Padma Purāṇa)

For this reason, one keeps the right attitude towards the Spiritual Master and should carefully worship his lotus feet. The Spiritual Master must be authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures, and if he is, then he is the direct representative of Lord Kṛṣṇa. It is stated in the Gautamīya-tantra that just by drinking the water that washed the deity of Śālagrāma Silā and is mixed with a Tulasī leaf, one goes back to Godhead. Similarly, by taking water that has washed the lotus feet of a pure Guru, one makes rapid spiritual advancement. But one should drink only a very little amount; that which is absorbed in the body and does not exit through urination.

CLEANLINESS AND PURITY

*snānāsatī tare naiva vāśasāmbhasi gātrataḥ
sammārjya vāśasi dadhyāt paridhāna uttarīya ke*

"Taking a bath or taking a shower with the bare body is not allowed for a civilized person. Any cloth that was worn while bathing should not be used after the bath to dry the body. A dry

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towel should be used to dry the body and after drying the body, one should wear fresh garments." (Padma Purāṇa)

The Garuḍa Purāṇa states that anyone interested in spiritual advancement should use water to wash their bottom after evacuating and then wash their hands seven times with soap and water. While bathing, one should never urinate in the water and should chant sacred mantras during the bath that are taught to the qualified by an authentic Spiritual Master.

But if due to some reason a celibate has a normal nocturnal discharge during sleep then he does not need to be in anxiety because such a natural emission does not diminish his spiritual energy. Only by knowingly releasing the stored energy or endeavoring to release through some other means such as by masturbation or through some other means, it contaminates the celibate person. Therefore, a celibate person should be careful in this regard. As it is stated:

*nāvartate vrataṁ svapne śukra-mokṣe kathañcana
bhikṣite paradāryam ca tad dharmasya na dūṣakam*

"If a celibate has a discharge at night due to seeing a lascivious dream, he does not need to take a new vow for his purification, but needs to clean up immediately thereafter the discharge. But if a woman genuinely pleads with him to conceive a child from him, if that woman's request is fulfilled; then that act does not reduce any purity of the celibate." (Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva 34.27)

*yo yasmin kurute karma yādr̄śam yena yatra ca
tādr̄śam tādṛṣe naiva sa guṇam pratipadyate*

"Whatever kind of action a person performed as per time, place, circumstance, and purpose, that kind of result that person receives in that circumstance." (Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva 62.8)

SEEING A VAISNAVA DANCE IN ECSTASY

*nṛtyantam vaiṣṇavam harṣād āśīno yastu paśyati
khañjo bhavati rājendra so'yam janmani janmani*

"If anyone sees a Vaiṣṇava dancing in ecstasy in a *kīrtan* (congregational chanting) and goes on sitting and does not participate in dancing and chanting, then that person becomes crippled birth after birth." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 8.253)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī comments on this verse, "If a devotee is dancing in ecstasy with love of Godhead, whosoever sees the devotee dance but does not also participate in that dance will become crippled for one hundred births. If this does not happen, then at least that person will become lame. If none of this happens, the person will certainly become a rascal devoid of all spiritual and philosophical understanding."

NATURAL HUMILITY OF A VAISNAVA

*nāham brahmāpi bhūyāsam rvad bhakti rahito hare
tvayī bhaktas tu kiṭo'pi bhūyāsam janma janmaṣu*

A sincere devotee prays, "O Lord Harī, I do not desire even the post of Lord Brahmā if it makes me become bereft of Your pure devotional service. If devotional service is available birth after birth, I do not mind taking birth even as a moth. This is my earnest desire." (Nārāyaṇa-vyūha)

Even though a pure devotee is under the direct care of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, still his humility has no bounds. In a wonderful song, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings, *kiṭa janma hau yathā tuā dāsa bahir mukha brahma janme nāhi*

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āsa, "I do not mind taking my next birth as a moth if I can remain Your devotee, but, O Lord, I do not desire even the post of Lord Brahmā if it is averse to You." (Sarṇāgati)

"A Vaiṣṇava never considers himself to be an exalted devotee, even if he factually is. Even though he sometimes assigns himself to a lower position, it does not mean that he is indeed a low person. If a Brāhmaṇa is not a Vaiṣṇava, his food is considered equal to food bought from a Śūdra, but if a Vaiṣṇava buys the food by paying money to the non-Vaiṣṇava Brāhmaṇa for his food, that food can be accepted by a Vaiṣṇava because that food becomes a Vaiṣṇava's possession and Vaiṣṇava's possessions are always glorified. A devotee is called a Vaiṣṇava because he gives up the association of non-Vaiṣṇavas. Therefore, a Vaiṣṇava should accept food in charity only from another Vaiṣṇava. As it is said, "You are what you eat." In this connection the Nīti Śāstra states:

*śūdrānnam śūdra samparkam śūdra strī maithunam yathā
iha janma niśūdratvam cāṇḍāla śata janmani*

"If one eats food grains from the hands of a Śūdra, associates closely or makes friendship with him, or enjoys with a Śūdra woman, he has already become a Śūdra in this life, and for the next one hundred births he takes his birth as an outcaste."

An advanced devotee is not attached to material things, which is why his behavior is pleasing and his association is elevating. His motto is to remain attached to serving the Lord, which is why he remains peaceful. Such a devotee understands that his service to the ever-youthful Lord should be regularly performed according to time, place, and circumstance. By doing so, his heart becomes cleansed of duplicity and hypocrisy. Thus he develops pure love for Godhead. He keeps friendship with the devotees and feels compassion towards the innocent.

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*athavā 'bhyāgataṁ dūrāt yon a arcayati vaiṣṇavam
sva saktyā nṛpa śārdūla na anyaḥ pāpa ratas tataḥ*

Mārkaṇḍeya Muni said to King Bhagīratha, "O best of kings, there is no worse sinner than a person who does not receive upon arrival, according to his ability, either a known or an unknown Vaiṣṇava who may have come from a far distance." (Skanda Purāṇa)

The word "devotee" signifies a servant of the Lord, but not a person who is engaged in karmic activities, mental speculation, or mysticism. When devotees meet one another, they immediately pay respects to one another. When they do so, Lord Śrī Viṣṇu comes in between them and accepts their respects. It is stated in the Vyāsa-gītā, "A Vaiṣṇava who does not pay respects in return when they are offered respects is considered to be equal to a Śūdra." Therefore, one must always return the respects offered to him. A senior Vaiṣṇava Sanyāsī may return the offered respects to a junior devotee with a reverential heart and bowed head along with folded hands. When one receives a Vaiṣṇava at their place, at first one should offer him a seat, drinking water, some *prasādam* according to one's capacity, along with some sweet words. This is because even a moment's association with an advanced devotee is the most valuable thing in life, because that moment opens the pathway to spiritual advancement. According to Mārkaṇḍeya Muni, if one does not welcome a Vaiṣṇava according to one's capacity, that person becomes implicated with intolerable sin, as much as a person who eats grains on the Ekādaśī day.

*dhanyoḥam kṛta kṛtyoḥam yad yūyam gṛham āgataḥ
durlabham darśanam nūnam vaiṣṇavānām tathā hareḥ
meru mandara-tulyā vai puṇya puṇja mayā kṛtaḥ
samprāptam darśanam yad vai vaiṣṇavānām mahātmanām*

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"After receiving a Vaiṣṇava, a host must fold hands and pray to the Vaiṣṇava, saying to him, 'O Vaiṣṇava, I am very grateful for your auspicious arrival at my place because seeing a Vaiṣṇava is certainly as rare as seeing Lord Śrī Viṣṇu. I feel that I have accumulated unlimited merits, equal to Mount Meru, giving me this opportunity to see such a great Vaiṣṇava at my place.'" (Skanda Purāṇa)

The Supreme Personality of Godhead explained to Uddhava in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam that the worship of His pure devotee is better than His own worship, *mad bhaktā pujābhyadhikāḥ*. Lord Kṛṣṇa refers here to a very advanced Vaiṣṇava. Mārkaṇḍeya Muni states in the Skanda Purāṇa that it is the duty of wise people to make friendship with a pure Vaiṣṇava and follow his instructions in regard to regularly worshipping Lord Śrī Harī using their mind, body, and words, because such a pure Vaiṣṇava is equal to Lord Śrī Harī.

EVERYONE SHOULD BECOME A VAIŚNAVA AND WORSHIP THE SUPREME LORD

*dharmārtha kāma moksānām yadiṣṭāñca nr̄ṇāmiha
tat sarvām labhate vatsa kathām śrtvā hareḥ sadā*

Lord Brahmā said, "O son Nārada, if a person in this world desires to achieve religiosity, economic development, sense gratification, and liberation, they should always worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead and also listen to His transcendental narrations." (Skanda Purāṇa)

Everyone should take up the path of bhaktiyoga, whether one has all material desires or has no desires at all.

bhaktir na vicyutā yeṣām na cyutāni vratāni ca

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supriyah śrīpatir yeśāṁ te ṣyur bhāgavatā narāḥ

Mārkaṇḍeya Muni says to King Bhagīratha, "O king, any person who is not devoid of devotional service, who fasts on Ekādaśī days, observes rules of the Kārtika month, and loves the Supreme Personality of Godhead, such a person is called a *bhāgavata* devotee (a very advanced devotee)." (Skanda Purāṇa)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī gives his commentary in the *Digdarśinī-tīkā* regarding fasting on Ekādaśī and also following the rules and regulations for the month of Kārtika (October-November). The symptoms of a devotee who is dedicated to the Supreme Personality of Godhead are fasting on Ekādaśī and following the proper rules for observing the month of Kārtika. No matter what, a sincere devotee does not deviate from these functions at any cost. That is why the Supreme Lord remains very dear to him. Especially in Vṛindāban, properly observing the functions of the Kārtika month is one of the main items in the discharge of devotional service to please the Lord.

THE PURPOSE OF GOING TO THE PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE

*muñcannāṅga tadarīga gaṅgam anīśāṁ tvāṁ eva samcintayan
śāntah śānti yato yato gatam adas tān āśramānāvasān
nityāṁ tān mukha pañkajād vigalita tvāt puṇya gāthāmṛtam
śrotah samplava sampluto nara hare na syām aham dehabhṛt*

"The purpose of going to holy places of pilgrimage is to see and associate with saintly people. By the influence of their association, one develops the taste to hear the transcendental narrations of Lord Kṛṣṇa. By seeing the saintly people, by touching them, or by hearing them speak, one develops great

faith in the Supreme Personality of Godhead. After developing some faith in the Lord, that person thinks, 'Oh, let me hear what subject they are speaking about.' (Śridhārī-tīkā 35)

Lord Kapiladeva says that by the association of a saintly person, one develops the taste for worshipping the Supreme Lord and starts chanting the names and glories of the Lord. By this, one develops distaste for material pleasures which were within the heart for a long time. At this time, one develops attachment to the Supreme Lord. In other words, the mind loses its attraction for sense gratification arising from passion and ignorance. If one has become engaged in the service of the Lord, one should know that it is the result of having associated with great saintly people.

One may ask about the position of those who worship the demigods, including ferocious demigods like Bhairava. The answer is that such worshipers are full of material desires. On the other hand, the devotees of the Lord, whether they want sense gratification or liberation from this world, are the best because rather than worshipping the demigods, they engage in the service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

*hari bhakti parāṇāntu sarīgināṁ sarigam āśritah
mucyate sarva pāpebhyo mahā pātaka vān api*

"Even those who are greatly sinful become free from all kinds of sins by associating with those who have taken shelter of the Supreme Lord Śrī Hari seriously." (Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa)

In the association of devotees, one naturally becomes encouraged to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, hear about Kṛṣṇa, and follow the regulative principles to become free from material contamination. By so doing, one achieves the mercy of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Thus, one gives up bad association and gradually develops taste for the Lord's pastimes. The pastimes of Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu are full of nectar, and the pastimes of

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Lord Kṛṣṇa are like camphor. When these two are combined, they taste wonderfully sweet; but only those who associate with pure devotees can relish their full sweetness. Indeed, to develop love of Godhead in the heart, the association of holy devotees is very much required.

*indriyānāṁ yathā sreṣṭhamāṁ manāḥ proktamāṁ maniṣibhīḥ
māṣānāṁ kārtikāḥ śreṣṭhaḥ pāñḍavānāṁ yathārjunāḥ*

"All the thoughtful sages have said that just as the mind is the leader of all the senses, and among the Pāñḍavas, Arjuna is the best, similarly, among all months, Kārtika is the best." (Padma Purāṇa, Kriyā-yoga-sāra 22.70)

WORSHIPPING AND USING TULASI

*tulasī rahitāṁ pūjāṁ na gṛhṇāti sadā hariḥ
kāṣṭhamāṁ vā sparśayed tatra no cet tānnāmato yajet
tulasī dalamādāya yo’nyāṁ devamāṁ prapūjayet
brahma hā sa hi goghnaś ca sa eva guru talpagāḥ*

"The Supreme Lord Harī does not accept anyone's worship without Tulasī leaves. But, if Tulasī leaves are not available, one can use Tulasī wood to touch the Supreme Lord's body and His offerings. If even Tulasī wood is not available, one can repeat the name of Tulasī while worshiping Lord Harī. If someone worships the demigods with Tulasī, they get the sin of killing a Brāhmaṇa or a cow, or the sin of enjoying the facilities of their own Spiritual Master free of cost." (Vāyu Purāṇa)

There is a statement in the Garuḍa Purāṇa about how one should make an offering of food to Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa: "The Supreme Lord should always be offered food along with Tulasī

leaves. Each time the offering is made, on each preparation, a leaf of Tulasī should be placed. One should not pick Tulasī leaves on Dvādaśī day (the day after the Ekādaśī day)." The Poet Chandrāśekhara says that the Lord does not accept any offering even if it includes fifty-six kinds of sweets and thirty-six kinds of curries if they are offered without adding Tulasī leaves. Tulasīdevī, Śālagrāma Śilā, and the Yamunā River are eternally present in the spiritual world. They appeared in this world to bestow upon the living entities the highest welfare, love of Godhead. In the Padma Purāṇa, Lord Kṛṣṇa says to His queen Satyabhāmā that in the month of Kārtika one should not pick Tulasī leaves on the day of Amalakī Ekādaśī or on the Dvādaśī days. Worship of the Amalakī tree in the month of Kārtika is also strongly recommended. The Amalakī fruit is one of the five main medical ingredients in the Āyurveda.

*yā dṛṣṭā nikhilāgha sarīgha samanī sprītā vāpuḥ pāvanī
rogānām abhivanditā niraśinī śiktāntaka trāśinī
pratyā satti vidhāyinī bhagavataḥ kṛṣṇasya samaropitā
nyastā taccaraṇe vimukti phaladā vṛṇdā tasyai namah*

"Just by looking at Tulasī, all of one's sins become mitigated. Just by touching her, one's body becomes purified. By praying to her, the diseases become removed. If one waters her or makes her wet, fear of Yamarāja (death personified) becomes removed. Just by planting or transplanting her, one achieves realization of the Supreme Lord. If someone offers her leaves at the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, she awards liberation. One must therefore pay their humble respects daily to the wonderful Tulasī." (Skanda Purāṇa)

Worshipping Tulasī in the Kārtika month is essential for accelerating one's devotion to the Lord. The Padma Purāṇa states that anyone who plants, protects, waters, picks leaves, saves her seeds, touches her, or worships her, becomes purified.

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If one keeps Tulasī Mahārāṇī very carefully in his house, the messengers of Yamarāja do not come near there.

*dr̥ṣṭvā spr̥ṣṭvā tathā dhyātā kīrtitā namitā śrutā
ropitā sevitā nityam pūjitā tulasī śubhā
navadhā tulasīm nityam ye bhajanti dine dine
yuga koṭi sahaśrāṇi te vaśanti harer gṛhe*

Lord Brahmā said to Nārada Muni, "Any person who daily sees Tulasī, touches Tulasī, chants Tulasī's prayers, meditates on Tulasī, pays obeisance to Tulasī, hears about Tulasī, transplants Tulasī, serves her, or worships her, achieves auspicious results. Any person who does these nine kinds of service, in a devotional mood, goes to the abode of the Supreme Lord and remains there permanently." (Skanda Purāṇa)

In the Padma Purāṇa, Uttarākhaṇḍa, there are thirty chapters regarding Tulasī's appearance in this world. Another name of Tulasī is Vṛṇḍādevī, which means, "one who awards residence in Vṛṇḍāban." As Narottama Dāsa says, *kṛpākari karo tāre vṛṇḍābana bāsī namo namo*. One should therefore very carefully handle this holy plant. In Kaliyuga, especially, Tulasīdevī burns all of the sins of a person who bathes her, gives her in charity, meditates on her, eats her leaves, worships Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa with her leaves, transplants her, or sings her glories.

*patram puṣpam phalam kāṣṭham tvat śākhā-pallavāṇikuram
tulasī sambhavam mūlam pāvanam mṛttikādy api*

"The leaves, flowers, fruits (seeds), branches, bark, sprouts, buds, and clay of Tulasī are all auspicious and purifying." (Prahlāda-saṁhitā)

The Skanda Purāṇa also states that the clay from Tulasī's roots is very holy. If in anyone's home there is a Tulasī plant or if anyone's forehead has a dot of Tulasī clay, they are not seen

by Yamarāja, because such people are considered equal to a demigod. If in anyone's house a dry piece of Tulasī is kept or her wilted leaves were offered to the Lord, then that place is considered to be as pure as the abode of Lord Viṣṇu.

*yah kuryāt tulasī kāṣṭhair akṣa mālāṁ svarūpiṇīṁ
kanātha mālāṁ ca yatnena kṛtam tasyākṣayam bhavet*

Lord Brahmā told Nārada, "If any person worships Lord Śrī Viṣṇu using Tulasī, chants *japa* using a beautiful *japa-mālā* (chanting bead made from Tulasī wood), and wears neck-beads made out of Tulasī wood, they achieve unlimited spiritual results." (Agastya Saṁhitā)

Those who wear Tulasī neck-beads have promised to refrain from further sinning. Any sinful person becomes purified by the touch of a Tulasī leaf that has been offered to Lord Kṛṣṇa. The potency of Tulasī is so great that by touching her, one obtains the result of being engaged in devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Just becoming free from sinful activities is not sufficient, one must become a sincere devotee as well, and this requires regular engagement in devotional service. To become free from sinful reactions without perfecting one's life through devotional service is just like emptying wine from a bottle and refilling it with nectar without first washing or cleaning it. In other words, becoming free from sin is only the beginning of the process of purification. Even if a most sinful person eats a Tulasī leaf first offered to the Supreme Lord and dies afterwards, whatever sins that person had committed using his body will be burned to ashes. As the whitish water of the Ganges and the blackish water of the Yamunā River remove many sins, so do the light-green Rāmā-Tulasī and the dark-green Kṛṣṇā-Tulasī remove all kinds of sins. If one eats Tulasī leaves after offering them to Lord Kṛṣṇa, one's ultimate desire becomes fulfilled.

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*kim citram asyāḥ patitarṁ tulasyā dalam jalam vā patitarṁ punīte
lagnādhi bhāla sthalam ālavāla-mṛtṣṇāpi kṛtṣṇa agha vināśanāya
śrimat tulaṣyāḥ patrasya mahātmyam yadyapi drśam
tathāpi vaiṣṇavaiṣṭān na grāhyam kṛṣṇārpaṇam vinā*

“What more can be said about the wonderful glories of Tulasī? The fallen leaves of Tulasī, her wilted leaves, and the water that includes her leaves, are all purifying. Even a minute dot made on the forehead from clay taken from Tulasī’s root (the soil in which Tulasī is planted) eradicates one’s sins. Even though the glories of Tulasīdevī are so great, and even though her leaves are so purifying, still, Vaiṣṇavas never eat Tulasī leaves without first offering them to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa.” (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 9.226, 227)

Even for medicinal purposes, Vaiṣṇavas never use Tulasī leaves without first offering them to the Lord. Tulasī leaves are never chewed by Vaiṣṇavas, who keeps in mind that she is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa. The reason for her being so pure is stated in the following way:

*koti brahmāṇḍa madhyeṣu yāni tīrthāni bhūtale
tulasī dalam āśritya tānyeva nivaśanti vai*

“All the places of pilgrimage of this planet earth and all the holy places of millions of universes reside in a Tulasī leaf.” (Padma Purāṇa, 24.10)

*yośnāti tulasī patraṁ sarva pāpa haraṁ śubhaṁ
tat śārīrāntara sthāyī pāpam naśyati tat kṣaṇāt
tulasī kāṣṭha sambhūtaṁ mālāṁ vahati yo narah
tad dehe pātakam nāsti satyam etat mayocyte*

Śrīla Vyāsadeva says to sage Jaimini, “If anybody eats a Tulasī leaf first offered to the Lord, all their sins are immediately

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removed, thereby making them meritorious. If one wears Tulasī neck-beads on their neck, no sins can reside in their body—I am telling you that this is the exact truth.” (Kriyā-yoga-sāra)

Tulasīdevī is most dear to Lord Śrī Hari and is addressed as Mahārāṇī (leading queen). Considering this, the question may arise that if she is so great and dear to the Lord and practically non-different from the Lord, why does one chew her leaves? The answer to this question is that a real Vaiṣṇava never chews Tulasī leaves but swallows them. But if someone does not know this rule and chews the leaves, then that person is forgiven because when Tulasī leaves are offered to the Lord, it becomes *mahā-prasāda* and when one eats *mahā-prasāda* for one's own purification, at that occasion chewing the leaves of Tulasī is not so offensive. But if someone eats it for sense gratification, then the act of chewing becomes an offense because *mahā-prasāda* is non-different from the Lord.

*karatāla dvayam̄ datvā ya ciṇoti tulasī dalam̄
yathā na kampate sākhā tulasyā dvija sattama
patrasya cayane devī bhagna sākhā yadā bhavet
tadā hṛdi vyathā viṣṇor jāyate tulasī-pate
sākhāgrāt patitar̄ bhūmau patraṁ patraṁ purātanam̄
tenāpi pūjyo govindo madhu kaiṭabha mardanaḥ*

“One should pick Tulasī leaves after making two clapping sounds using his hands, O best of the Brāhmaṇas. While picking Tulasī leaves, no branches of Tulasī should be shaken. If, while picking Tulasī leaves, any of the branches are broken, that creates pain in the heart of the Supreme Lord Śrī Hari who is the husband of Tulasī. If the tip of the branch (the flowers or the *mañjarīs*) or leaves of Tulasī fall to the ground due to being pale or becoming old, they can also be used to worship Lord Śrī Govinda, the killer of the Madhu and Kaiṭabha demons.” (Padma Purāna 24. 42, 43, 44)

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It is necessary to pick Tulasī leaves to worship Lord Kṛṣṇa, but picking her leaves causes her pain, as does plucking one's hair. Therefore, before picking her leaves, one should make two or three clapping sounds and then start picking Tulasī leaves delicately. One should not use a knife, scissors, or fingernails to pick Tulasī leaves, but should only use the fingertips of the right hand while chanting the Mahāmantra softly and while gently holding her branch with the left hand.

AUSTERITIES FOR EKĀDAŚI

*dugdhābdhiḥ bhogi śayane bhagavān ananto
yaśmin dine svapiti cāthāvibhudhyate ca
tasminn ananya maṇasam upavāsa bhājam
kāmarām dadāty abhimatarā garuḍāṅka sāyī*

"Anyone who fasts with one-pointed intelligence on the day of Devaśayanī Ekādaśī, when the Supreme Lord goes to takes rest in the Milk Ocean on the bed of Ananta Śeṣa, the enemy of Garuda; and also fasts on the day He wakes up (on Devotthāni Ekādaśī), has all desires fulfilled by the mercy of the Supreme Lord Sri Hari." (Padma Purāṇa)

The essence of transcendental knowledge is devotional service, and the root of devotional service is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, anyone who desires liberation must worship and please Lord Kṛṣṇa with full faith. If one has true devotion, that person can worship the Supreme Lord with just a Tulasī leaf and a cup of water and attain the Lord's eternal abode because Lord Kṛṣṇa is dependent on the devotee's devotion and not on the offering. One of the main devotional processes to please the Lord is the Ekādaśī fast, and the result of performing this fast is described by the

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Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself. (See our book Ekādaśī, The Day of Lord Harī). If one cannot fully fast on the Ekādaśī day they can eat fruits, potatoes, sweet potatoes, tapioca, milk products, along with rock (Ekādaśī) salt and black pepper powder as many times a day as one needs to eat. But one should not eat any grains or beans on the Ekādaśī day. No one but Lord Kṛṣṇa can describe such a great merit of fasting on the Ekādaśī day. (See our book Ekādaśī, The Day of Lord Harī) Just by performing the Ekādaśī fast, one becomes free from sins, but one should not make a habit of committing sins on the strength of one's merits. The Pañcharātrāntara states, *ekādaśyāṁ na ca aśnīyāt pakṣayor ubhayor api*, "One should not eat any food that includes grains or beans on the Ekādaśī days of either the waning or waxing fortnights, and should worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead and chant His holy names."

Although all Ekādaśīs are meritorious, devotees are especially requested to carefully observe fasts on Devaśayānī (Padmā) and Prabodhīnī (Haribodhīnī) Ekādaśīs to achieve special blessings of the Lord. In the Skanda Purāṇa Lord Brahmā tells Nārada Muni that a wife of Kaśyapa Muni named Kadru gave birth to snakes headed by Vāsuki and Śeṣa. And another wife of Kaśyapa named Vinitā wanted a son who could defeat Kadru's sons, the snakes. So by the blessings of Kaśyapa Muni, Vinitā got Garuḍa as her son. Although snakes and Garuḍa are enemies because snakes are Garuda's food; both Garuḍa and Śeṣa (a snake incarnation of God), serve the Lord simultaneously in the Milk Ocean. This happened by the mercy they obtained by fasting on Ekādaśī, the day of Lord Hari. If a devotee carefully fasts on the day of Lord Harī, they too become free from all kinds of problems.

*bhaktipradā hareḥ sā tu namnākṣatā pravodhīnī^ī
yā sā viṣṇoh parā mūrtir avyaktāneka rūpiṇī^ī
sā kṣiptā mānuṣe loke dvādaśī munī puṇigavā*

Lord Yamarāja said to Nārada Muni, "The Prabodhinī Ekādaśī is especially famous for rewarding devotion to Lord Harī. O best of the sages, the personality of Ekādaśī is present on this earth in an unmanifested form of Lord Harī. Sometimes the Ekādaśī day falls on the Dvādaśī day, and due to this, only the pure devotee's calculation should be taken for fasts." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 16.301)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī remarks in his *Digdarśinī-tīkā*: "One who strictly observes the Ekādaśī fast automatically worships Lord Śrī Harī. That is why Ekādaśī is said to be equal to Lord Harī Himself."

*samsare yani papani tany eva ekadasi dine
annam asritya tishthanti sriman narayana ajanayā*

"By the order of Lord Śrī Nārāyaṇa (a name of Lord Kṛṣṇa), all kinds of sins that exist in this world reside in food grains on the Ekādaśī day. Therefore, in every circumstance, one should totally avoid eating grains and beans on the Ekādaśī day." (Padma Purāṇa, Kriyā-yoga-sāra 22.50).

Sage Mārkaṇḍeya Muni tells King Bhagiratha in the Skanda Purāṇa, "Those who do not eat food grains on the day of Lord Harī (Ekādaśī), even in the most difficult conditions, should be considered very advanced devotees." "A natural symptom of a sincere Vaiṣṇava is that they enthusiastically fast on the Ekādaśī days and study her glories narrated by Lord Kṛṣṇa for that particular day and then break their fast properly on the next day. Such devotees should be considered to be advanced devotees." (Digdarśinī-tīkā 10.6)

If a person is determined to fast on the Lord's appearance days and on the Ekādaśī days they are said to be meritorious because in the three worlds, there is no more meritorious fast than the Day of Lord Harī. Even if one performs this fast without a proper attitude, one gradually develops pure

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love for God and achieves His supreme abode. If anyone fasts on the Ekādaśī day with full devotion, no one can say how much merit that devotee is awarded by the Supreme Lord.

*prasādānnam sadā grāhyam ekādasyāṁ na nārada
rāmādi-sarva bhaktānām itareśāñca kā kathā*

"O Nārada, one should not eat even *mahā-prasādam* (sanctified food that comes directly from the Lord's plate) that includes grains on Ekādaśī days. This principle is meant even for the neophyte devotees, what to speak of other devotees." (Nārada Pañcharātra)

Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī, in his Bhakti-sandarbha, quotes from the Matsya Purāṇa: "Any Vaiśnava who, giving up all whims, fasts on the Ekādaśīs of both the light and dark fortnights, and then properly breaks the fast on the Dvādaśī day, will rapidly advance in spiritual life."

According to the Padma Purāṇa, the Pāpapuruṣa (sin personified), was ordered by the Lord to reside in food grains on the Lord's days, like His appearance days and the Ekādaśī days. Anyone who eats food grains on such days verily eats sins and thus becomes grievously sinful. Therefore, one is advised to not eat any grains on Ekādaśī days and the Lord's appearance days. One cannot enter into the spiritual world if one remains sinful. Therefore, purification is very necessary. Holy days like Ekādaśī days are the extension of the Lord's mercy for human purification. Therefore it does not matter who, everyone should fast on the holy days like the Ekādaśīs.

*brahma-cāri grhastho vā vānaprastho 'thavā yati
ekādasyāṁ hi bhūñjāno bhunkte go-māṁsam eva hi*

"No matter which social or spiritual status one falls in, everyone, including the celibates, householders, retired or

renounced people, or those who fall in any other social order such as outcastes or aborigines, if they eat food grains on Ekādaśī days or on the birth days of the Lord, they acquire the same grievous sin as that received by eating cow's meat." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa)

*na saiva na ca saurohasaun na sakta gana-sevakah
yo bhunkte vasare visnor jneyah pasvadiko hi sah*

"Whether one worships Lord Śiva, Goddess Durgā, Goddess Kālī, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Bhairava, or any other demigod, they should avoid eating foods that include grains and beans on the fasting days of Lord Harī (Ekādaśī days and the appearance days of God). If one does not properly follow this rule of fasting and eats foods as per their wish, then they are considered to be worse than animals." (Padma Purāṇa)

*ekādaśyāṁ parer dattāṁ dīpāṁ prajvālyā mūṣikā
manuṣyāṁ durlabham prāpya parāṁ gatim avāpa sā*

"Once, on an Ekādaśī day, a female mouse accidentally offered a ghee lamp to the deity of the Supreme Lord in a temple that had been offered by someone else. By so doing, that female mouse achieved the rare human form of life, and ultimately, by spiritual practice, went back to Godhead." (Skanda Purāṇa)

This history of the mouse is very famous and is told in the Kārtika Māhātmya. There was once a mouse living in a temple of the Supreme Lord who would regularly eat the ghee from the extinguished ghee wicks that were offered to the Lord by the visiting devotees. One day, being unbearably hungry, the mouse tried to eat ghee from a burning lamp. While eating ghee from the burning lamp, the burning cotton wick became stuck in her teeth. Feeling hot, the mouse started jumping upwards

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clockwise, thus making clockwise circles in front of the Deity. Her body caught on fire and she died while making circles with the burning wick. The Lord mercifully accepted her jumping with a burning ghee wick stuck in her mouth as His *āratī*-worship and gave her a human body in her next life, and liberation after that. Such is the influence and potency of devotional service done on Ekādaśi days.

KĀRTIKA-VRATA

*kārtikeśmin višeṣeṇa nityarāṇ kurvīta vaiṣṇavah
dāmodarārcanam prātah snāna dāna vratādikam*

“Specifically in the month of Kārtika, Vaiṣṇavas should daily worship Lord Dāmodara, bathe early in the morning, give charity, and take vows to follow some extra rules and regulations of worship for purity.” (Skanda Purāṇa)

*niyamena vinā vīprāh kārtikam yah kṣipen narah
kr̄ṣṇa prāti-mukhas tasya yaśmād ūrjo'sya vallabhāḥ*

Nārada Muni said to all the sages headed by Śaunaka Ṛṣi, “O Brāhmaṇas, if someone tries to observe Kārtika vows without properly following scriptural rules and regulations, Lord Śrī Kr̄ṣṇa turns His face away from that person because this month is very pleasing to Him.” (Padma Purāṇa)

One should be humble enough to follow the instructions of a pure devotee. Without the guidance of a pure devotee, one's voluntarily acceptance of bodily discomforts (performing austerities) for the pleasure of the Lord will not bear sufficient merits to advance in spiritual life. The pure Spiritual Master cannot always be physically present everywhere to direct the

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disciple on the proper path. Therefore, one must take guidance from *sādhu* (truly advanced devotees) and *śāstra* (Vedic scriptures) and match them with the guidelines received from their pure Spiritual Master to go back to Godhead.

*yair na dattam̄ hutam̄ japtam̄ na snānam̄ na harer vrataṁ
na kṛtaṁ kārtike putra dvijas te vai narādhamah*

Lord Brahmā said, "O son Nārada, those Brāhmaṇas who do not give charity, perform sacrifice, chant *japa*, or follow vows of purification to please Lord Harī in the month of Kārtika are called fallen among mankind." (Skanda Purāṇa)

If a twice-born person is completely unable to fast and perform the proper procedures of Kārtika-vrata, then at least they should give up certain ingredients from their usual diet. At first one should wake up before twilight, bathe, engage in *nāma-saṅkīrtana*, and perform some special services to please Lord Kṛṣṇa. There are two essential things in Kārtika—to regularly offer a ghee lamp to Lord Dāmodara, and to remain awake during *brahma-muhūrta* (very early in the morning).

*na kārtika samo māso na kṛtena samam̄ yugam
na veda sadṛśam̄ śāstram̄ na tīrtha gaṅgayaṁ samam
kārtikāḥ pravaro māso vaiṣṇavānām̄ priyāḥ sadā
kārtikam̄ śakalaṁ yastu bhaktyā sevate vaiṣṇavāḥ*

"Just as there is no *yuga* which is equal to Satyayuga, there is no scripture that is equal to the Vedas, and there is no place of pilgrimage equal to the Ganges, similarly, there is no month which is equal to Kārtika. Therefore, Kārtika month is very dear to the Vaiṣṇavas. They follow all of its rules with proper devotion." (Skanda Purāṇa)

According to the scriptures, certainly among all months Kārtika is the most purifying month. As Ekādaśī is the day of

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Lord Harī, similarly, Kārtika (which is also called Dāmodara month) is the month of Lord Harī. If anyone offers with good faith even a little service to the Lord during this month, especially in Vṛindāban (Vraja-dhāma), *the Supreme Lord Harī rewards His abode to that person.*

*pravṛttānāṁ ca bhaksānāṁ kārtike niyame krte
avasyāṁ krṣṇa rūpatvarāṁ prāpyate muktidāṁ śubham*

"In the month of Kārtika, if someone gives up some ingredients (items) from their usual diet they undoubtedly achieve an opportunity to obtain liberation and attain the same form as the Supreme Lord, Śrī Krṣṇa." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 16.49)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī remarks in the *Digdarśinī-tīkā*, "People who daily gratify their senses and consider performing spiritual austerities impossible should at least minimize certain ingredients in their usual diet during the Kārtika month. Obtaining Lord Krṣṇa means that Lord Krṣṇa liberates the devotee from all material miseries and blesses the devotee with auspiciousness and happiness. If someone sins in the month of Kārtika, the sin of that person becomes immutable. Therefore, one should carefully avoid sinning during the Kārtika month. Whatever merit one achieves by observing vows in Kārtika cannot be achieved in any other month. Especially following the Kārtika vows is very dear to the Vaiṣṇavas."

*snānam jāgaranāṁ dīpam tulasī vana pālanam
kārtike ye prakurvanti te narā viṣṇu mūrtayah*

Lord Krṣṇa said to Satyabhāmā, "In the month of Kārtika, any person who regularly takes an early bath, offers a burning lamp, gives some charity, takes care of a Tulasī plant, and remains awake during the daytime, achieves the same form as Lord Śrī Viṣṇu." (Padma Purāṇa)

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Lord Brahmā tells Nārada in the Skanda Purāṇa that one who is serious about making spiritual advancement will surely postpone other religious functions just to follow the process of the Kārtika month in Vraja-dhāma, Vrindāban. If one does so and hears about the glories of Lord Hari, they become free from the cycle of repeated birth and death. If one offers a lamp to Lord Harī during this month, even for a short period, that person destroys the sins accumulated for one million *kalpas* (millenniums).

*yathā ca mathanād vanhiḥ sarva kāṣṭheṣu drṣyate
tathā ca drṣyate dharma dīpadāne na samśayah*

"Just as by rubbing two pieces of wood-sticks together one can see fire, similarly by offering a burning ghee lamp to the Lord in the month of Kārtika one can undoubtedly realize one's own merits quickly." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 16.120)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī explains in his *Digdarśinī-tīkā*, "Even though fire is present in all pieces of wood, without rubbing them together the fire does not manifest. Similarly, although merits are undoubtedly available in all spiritual functions, one can only realize the merits quickly by offering a lamp in the month of Kārtika in a holy place. Besides this there is no other way."

*vaiṣṇavo na sa mantavyaḥ samprāpte kārtike mune
yo na yacchatī mūḍhātmā dīparā kesāva sadmani*

"O sage, any person who does not offer a lamp to Lord Kṛṣṇa in His temple during the Kārtika month, that ignorant person is not considered a Vaiṣṇava." (Padma Purāṇa)

Whatever shortcomings one has are all neutralized from the day on which a ghee lamp is offered in front of the Lord in the temple. The result of this merit is that the person develops

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symptoms of one who is going back to Godhead. In other words, that person increases attachment to the devotional process of purification. Offering a lamp to the Lord during the Kārtika month is so important, especially for Vaiṣṇavas, that according to the Dīgdarśinī-tīkā (16.121), if necessary, one should certainly earn money to be able to go to Vṛindāban for Ūrjā-vrata (taking a vow of performing extra devotional activities in Kārtika month).

*mathurāyāṁ narair ūrje snātvā dāmodaro'rcitāḥ
kṛṣṇa rūpa hi te jñeya na atra kārya vicāraṇā*

“Any person who, after taking a nice bath, worships Lord Dāmodara in the Mathurā area during the whole month of Kārtika certainly achieves the same form as Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself. There is no speculation in this.” (Padma Purāṇa)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī comments in his Dīgdarśinī-tīkā saying, “Human beings achieving the same form as Kṛṣṇa’s means that they see Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa face-to-face. In other words, they become as worshipable as the Lord. This is the understanding here.”

*sulabhā mathurā bhūmau praty abdaṁ kārtikas tathā
tathāpi saṁsārāntīha narā mūḍha bhavāmbudhau
yāni sarvāṇī tīrthāṇī nadā nadyāḥ sarāṁsi ca
kārtike nivasanty atra māthure sarva maṇḍale*

“Even though one can easily reach Mathurā (the Vraja area) from any part of this earth, and the Kārtika month comes each year and is easily attainable each year, and all of the holy places of pilgrimage, oceans, rivers, and lakes come to reside in the Mathurā area in the month of Kārtika, still, those human beings who are unfortunate and meant to suffer in the ocean of material existence cannot take advantage of this fortune.” (Padma Purāṇa)

The person who is fortunate regularly follows the Kārtika vows properly. The merits achieved by following the Kārtika vows are not just some statements in the scriptures, but they are facts that have been realized by those who have strictly followed the prescribed vows of Kārtika. Although the Supreme Lord is very difficult to know, even by great sages like the four Kumāras, He was easily realized by Dhruva Mahārāja, although just a child, because he worshiped Lord Dāmodara and fasted in the Kārtika month in Madhuvana (a particular area nearby Mathurā).

*āśvinasya tu māsaṣya ya śuklaikādaśī bhavet
kārtikasya vratāñīha tasyāṁ kuryād atandritaḥ*

Lord Kṛṣṇa told Satyabhāmā, "On the day of Ekādaśī that falls in the light fortnight of the month of Āśviṇa (September-October), one should take a vow to observe the rules and regulations of the Kārtika month without any lethargy." (Padma Purāṇa)

The taking of vows for the Kārtika month begins from Pāśāñkuṣā Ekādaśī, five days before the actual Kārtika month. The last five days of the Kārtika month are known as Bhīṣma-pañchaka, when grandfather Bhīṣmadeva (of the Mahābhārat) fasted for five days, preparing to give up his body. However, one should observe Kārtika-vrata as per the vow taken but should intensify it in the Bhīṣma-pañchaka (in the last five days for Kārtika month). The best way to observe the Kārtika-vrata is to abstain from eating any kinds of grains for the whole month, and to take only milk or liquids for the last five days. If one eats grains during the Kārtika month, then one should avoid eating them for the last five days. But if one eats full meals twice a day in whole Kārtika then one should eat only once a day in Bhīṣma-pañchaka. This is the proper procedure of following Kārtika-vrata.

OBSERVING THE BHĪṢMA PAṄCHAKA

The Supreme Lord Himself gave these five days to Bhiṣmadeva for fasting. These five days (of the light fortnight of Kārtika) were performed previously by Vaśiṣṭha Muni, Bhṛgu Muni, Garga Muni, and many other sages in Satyayuga. In Tretāyuga, Ambarīṣa Mahārāja performed this fast by putting aside all of his royal pleasures. In Dvāparayuga, Kuntīdevī and the celebrated wives of the Brāhmaṇas performed this fast and chanted *japa* and helped their husbands in the performance of sacrifices. Even Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas followed the rules of the Kārtika fast. This five-day fast is not very difficult and someone who observes this vow is considered to have observed many kinds of fasts in one fast, because it is greatly meritorious and frees one from great sins. If one decides to observe it then one should eat only vegetables, fruits, milk products, and faithfully worship Lord Kṛṣṇa. If one needs to eat food then eating should be done only in the afternoons or only in the evenings. Females can also observe this vow and if a widow observes this fast, she also attains liberation.

All of one's material and spiritual desires become fulfilled and help one to control the senses by following this five-day fast. But it is more auspicious to follow this and the Kārtika fast in a most auspicious place like Vrindāban in India. If one follows this rule of the Kārtika fast, one attains the results attainable from fasting on the auspicious days for a whole year. As per one's capacity, at the end of the fast, one should give charity to a devotee who is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures to receive the charity. For anyone who fasts for these five days which include the Ekādaśī day, the path to hell is completely closed. The merits that are very difficult to achieve are achieved by those who fast on these five days.

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Śrīla Sūta Goswāmī said in the Padma Purāṇa, Uttarākhaṇḍa, "This liberating fast is not even known to the demigods in heaven. If one listens to what I have said, and fasts on these five days called the Bhīṣma-pañchaka, one becomes free from grievous sins."

*na gṛhe kārtike kuryād viśeṣena tu kārtikāṁ
tīrthe tu kārtikīm kuryāt sarva yatnena bhāvīnī*

Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa said to Satyabhāmā, "O beautiful lady, specifically in the month of Kārtika one should endeavor to take a vow of fasting in a place of pilgrimage and observe it there, rather than in one's own residence." (Skanda Purāṇa)

Unlike other months, specifically during Kārtika one should perform extra austerities and extra devotional activities, as per one's capacity. These should be done in a place of pilgrimage because such places, due to their purity, are more favorable for the performance of spiritual life, and award more merit. Vaiṣṇavas take a vow to fast for the Kārtika month on the Ekādaśī day which comes before the Kārtika month. But the Smārtas (who only follow the ritualistic part of the Vedas) start their Kārtika month from the full moon day which comes five days after Vaiṣṇavas begin their Kārtika vow. A serious devotee should not follow Smārtas ways. One should avoid smearing oils on their body, daytime sleeping, eating of all lentils, dāl, all beans, eggplants, nuts, and raw sugar, during the whole month of Kārtika. Moreover the Nīti Śāstra states:

*makare badarī mūlā vaisākhe nimbi bhakṣaṇam
tūlāyām matsya vartāgī sadya go-māṁsa bhakṣaṇam*

"Those who eat radishes or plums (Ber) in the month of Māgha (January-February), bitter foods or neem leaves in the month of Vaiśākha (April-May), or raw sugar and eggplant in the

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month of Kārtika (October-November) verily obtain the sin of eating cow's meat."

*tataḥ priyatama viṣṇo rādhikā gopikāśu ca
kārtike pūjanīyā ca śrī dāmodara sannidhau*

"Among all other gopīs (cowherd girls), Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is the dearest to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, one should worship Lord Dāmodara along with Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī in the month of Kārtika." (Padma Purāṇa)

Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma is under the control of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. There is a saying in the Vrajavāsī language—*dāra dāra aura pāta pāta pai śrī rādhe rādhe hoyā*: "What to speak of active living entities, even every tree and their branches and leaves in Sri Vrindāban dhāma silently repeat 'Rādhe Rādhe.'" The scriptures recommend that in the Kārtika month one should sing Dāmodarāṣṭaka, a song sung by Satyavrata Muni, to please the Supreme Lord.

*phalaṁ dadāti sampūrṇam yamunā-snāna mātrataḥ
akāmo vā sakāmo vā yamune salile nṛpa*

Nārada Muni said, "Whether one is full of material desires or completely desireless, if one bathes in the Yamunā river their desires become fulfilled." (Padma Purāṇa, Svarga khaṇḍa 29.8).

It is found in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa that since the River Yamunā eternally flows in the spiritual world, its water is so purifying that bathing just once in the Yamunā is equal to bathing one hundred times in the Ganges. Therefore, it is natural that one who bathes in the Yamunā quickly achieves love of Lord Kṛṣṇa in which material satisfaction is included. Because Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa played in the Yamunā in Vṛindāban, it is more purifying than other holy rivers. It is especially more purifying where it flows through Vṛindāban. It is advised in the Padma

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Purāṇa that it is better to carefully follow the scriptural injunctions to advance in spiritual life than to be lazy and think that it is not so necessary. One should have faith in the spiritual process and follow it to develop love for Lord Kṛṣṇa.

*prātah snānam naro yo vai kārtike śrī harī priye
karoti sarva tīrtheṣu yat snātvā tat phalam labhet
kārtike yo naro dadyāt pradīpam nabhaṣi dvijah
vipra hatyādibhiḥ pāpair mukto gacched harer gr̥ham*

"In the month of Kārtika, which is very dear to Lord Harī, one who bathes early in the morning attains the merit of bathing in the holy places of pilgrimage. Anybody who offers the Lord a ghee lamp in the month of Kārtika, O Brāhmaṇa, becomes free from all kinds of sins, including the grievous ones, and goes to the abode of Lord Śrī Harī." (Brahma Khaṇḍa 3.11,12)

*rādhā dāmodarābhyām ya puṣpam mālyām suvāṣitam
kārtike māṣi sa dadyāt yāti vaikuṇṭha mandiram*

Sūta Goswāmī said, "Any person who offers beautiful fragrant flower garlands to Śrī Śrī Rādhā Dāmodara in Vṛindāban in the month of Kārtika certainly goes to Vaikuṇṭha dhāma, the spiritual world of Lord Viṣṇu." (Brahma khaṇḍa 20.6)

*kārtika vratīnām vipra yathokta kāriṇam naram
yama-dūtāḥ palāyante simham dṛṣṭvā yathā gajah
śreṣṭham viṣṇu-vratām vīprā tat tulyā na śatam makhāḥ
kṛtvā kratum urje svargyam vaikuṇṭham kārtika vratī*

Sūta Goswāmī said, "If anyone fasts during the month of Kārtika according to the rules found in the Vedic scriptures, the Yamadūtas (the messengers of Yamarāja) run away from that person, just as an elephant runs away by seeing a lion. The

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Kārtika fast is very dear to Lord Viṣṇu. Therefore it is even better than performing one hundred great sacrifices which would take one only to heaven, but the person who fasts during Kārtika goes to the spiritual world. There is an immense difference between these two." (Padma Purāṇa)

*kārtika vratinah punyarī brahmā caiva caturmukhah
na samartha bhaved vaktum yathokta vrata kāriṇāḥ*

"Even the four-headed Brahmā is unable to describe the merits attained by a person who fasts during the Kārtika month. I, Sūta Goswāmī, am also unable to describe the results attained by such fasting. It is so great." (Brahma Khanda 21.33)

In the Skanda Purāṇa, Lord Brahmā tells Nārada about how dear Kārtika is to Lord Kṛṣṇa: "O son, Nārada, the month of Kārtika is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa. If anyone follows this month correctly just to please Lord Kṛṣṇa, that person receives unlimited spiritual results. This is the truth." (Bhakti-sandarbha-tīkā 948, 949)

*pādme kārtika-māhātmye ca brāhmaṇa kanyayāḥ
kārtika vrata ekādaśī vrata prabhāvāt śrīmat
satyabhāmākhyā-bhagavat preyaśī pada prāptir
api śrūyate, kim bahunā?*

"A Brāhmaṇa's daughter once properly observed fasting on Ekādaśī days and also followed all the Kārtika vows properly. As a result, she took birth as one of Lord Kṛṣṇa's beloved wives, known as Satyabhāmā. What more can be said about the importance of the Kārtika fast?" (Bhakti-sandarbha-tīkā 965).

Once, when Lord Kṛṣṇa was with Satyabhāmā, she asked Him about how she became His dear queen. Lord Kṛṣṇa replied that she became so dear to Him because she had regularly fasted on all the Ekādaśīs and also observed all the Kārtika

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months in her previous lives. He said, "These two days (the Ekādaśis) and one month (Kārtika) are very dear to Me. Since you properly followed these two, you have now become my very dear wife and are able to sit on My left side." Such is the merit of observing the Kārtika and Ekādaśī fasts.

MAINTAINING THE BODY TO SERVE KRŚNA

*dharmasya āyatāṁ yatnāc śarīraṁ paripālayet
na hi deham vinā viṣṇuḥ puruṣair vidyate paraḥ*

"Just to follow spiritual principles and austerities one should take care of one's body properly and nicely. Without having a healthy body one cannot perform any vows happily nor can one worship Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa properly to attain the supreme abode. Therefore taking care of the body should be done only to please Lord Kṛṣṇa and for nothing else." (Padma Purāṇa, Svarga khaṇḍa 54.36).

Thus ends the Fifth Chapter of the Vrajavāsī Realization.

CHANTING THE HOLY NAMES OF THE LORD



अज्ञानादथवाज्ञानाद् सूष्टो दहत्यनलो यथा ।
तथैव दहति गोविन्द नाम व्याजादपीरितम् ॥७॥

*ajñānād athavā jñānāt spr̄sto dahati 'nalo yathā
tathaiva dahati govinda nāma vyājād apīritam*

Just as whether someone knowingly or unknowingly touches fire it burns, similarly, the name of Govinda is so potent that it burns all one's sins, even if someone was tricked into chanting.

It is certain that whether nectar is drunk knowingly or unknowingly, it will make one immortal. Similarly, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam states that Lord Kṛṣṇa's names are transcendental nectar and by chanting them one obtains liberation. Lord Kṛṣṇa's names are so potent that even if one chants them in a disgusted or critical mood, chants them jokingly, or chants them while in illusion, one's sins become destroyed. Just as a heap of dry grass burns into ashes when it contacts fire, so the fire-like holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa destroys sins of the chanter. This means the continuous chanting of the holy name mitigates committed offenses, elevates one to the platform of pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and promotes one to the spiritual world.

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*oṁ asya jānanto nāma cid viviktana mahaste
viṣṇo sumatiṁ bhajāmahe*

A devotee prays, "O Lord, we will seriously chant Your holy names, which are full of knowledge and bliss, and clean the contaminated intelligence, turning it into good." (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad)

There are two stages in the process of chanting. The first is the stage of practice and if one tries to chant the holy name offenselessly one reaches the second stage, the realizing stage, in which the chanter knows that the holy name is non-different from Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. At this stage, the chanter becomes purified of material contamination. When material contamination is removed from the heart one's dormant knowledge becomes reawakened and the person marches towards self-realization. Of all names of the Lord, the name Kṛṣṇa is the most purifying. Therefore, Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu has especially recommended that one chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra of Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare / Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. In addition to chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra, the Spiritual Master gives the Gāyatrī mantras to his sincere disciple to increase their rate of spiritual advancement. Guru awards seven kinds of Gāyatrī mantras to his dedicated disciple secretly and among all the Gāyatrī mantras the seventh Gāyatrī mantra is the topmost. The Gopālatāpaṇī Upaniṣad states that the chanting of the eighteen-syllable mantra (the seventh Gāyatrī) is likened to the sun that illumines the heart of the sincere chanter. But the most important among all chanting is the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra. This Mahāmantra is written by Śrīla Vyāsadeva five thousand years ago in Brahmānda Purāṇa, Uttarākhaṇḍa. Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu repeated it and encouraged everyone to chant it to become free from sins in Kaliyuga. Śrīla Vyāsadeva wanted everyone to chant and wrote it as a verse in the following way:

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*hare kr̄ṣṇa hare kr̄ṣṇa kr̄ṣṇa kr̄ṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare*

Lord Kr̄ṣṇa appears in many ways just to help everyone become fully purified and obtain liberation. Lord Kr̄ṣṇa appeared in Dvaparayuga taking the form of the author of Vedanta (Śrīla Vyāsadeva) and wrote scriptures to guide everyone to adopt spiritual life. He also takes the form of a scripturally authentic Guru and gives instructions personally and then as Supersoul (Paramātmā) He (the Lord) inspires from within to take the teachings to heart. These are the main three ways Lord Kr̄ṣṇa helps the living entity to become purified and go back to the spiritual world. Chanting the above stated Mahāmantra is very potent as it is stated In the Padma Purāṇa:

*hari haratīti pāpāni duṣṭa-cittair api smṛtaḥ
anicchann api saṁspṛṣṭo dahaty eva hi pāvakāḥ*

“Just as fire burns one even if one touches it knowingly or unknowingly, similarly, it does not matter what condition one chants the Lord's holy names, it burns one's sins.”

*LORD CHAITANYA APPEARS TO INTRODUCE
HARINĀMA-SĀNKĪRTANA*

*kr̄ṣṇa-varṇāṁ tviṣākṛṣṇāṁ sāṅgopāṅgāstra-pārṣadāṁ
yajñaiḥ sāṅkīrtana-prāyair yajanti hi su-medhasāḥ*

“In the age of Kaliyuga, the Supreme Lord Himself will appear incognito and chant the names of Lord Kr̄ṣṇa. Although His physical complexion will not be blackish, nonetheless He will be Lord Śrī Kr̄ṣṇa Himself. He will be accompanied by His

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associates, servants, weapons, and confidential companions. Those with fine intelligence will participate in His mission and will perform congregational chanting to worship that incarnation of Godhead who constantly will sing the names of Lord Kṛṣṇa." (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.5.32)

It is not just that Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas induce people to chant the holy names of God, Goddess Parvati also persuaded her sons (Lord Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya) to chant the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa. As it is stated in the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 11.182:

*mā ṛcho mā yajus tāta mā sāma paṭha kincana
govindeti hrer-nāma geyam gāyasva nityaśah*

"O sons, it is not necessary for you to study any of the Vedas like the R̥gveda, Yajurveda and Sāmavedas. You only need to repeat the holy name of Lord Govinda because it is the most benefitting thing for you. Therefore, you should daily chant the holy names of Lord Govinda."

Furthermore the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa states that no other pious deeds are able to reward one with liberation from this world:

*iṣṭāpūrtāni karmāṇi subahūni kṛtāny api
bhava-hetuni tāny eva harer-nāma tu muktidam*

"Even if one performs many pious and meritorious deeds still they keep one within the cycle of birth and death. The only remedy for liberation from this material world is sincerely chanting the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa."

There are two kinds of chanting—one is called the congregational chanting and the other is called the singularly chanting. The congregational chanting is explained by Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī thus, *saṁkīrtana bahubhir militvā tad-gāna-sukham* *śrī-kṛṣṇa-gānam*, "When many people gather at one place and

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melodiously and loudly sing the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa in unison that is called Saṅkīrtana (congregational chanting).” In another place Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī further states, *nāma-saṅkīrtanā cedam ucchair eva praśastam*, “When saṅkīrtana (Congregational chanting) is done loudly that is called the best saṅkīrtana.” In the stavamālā of Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī, Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa gave a commentary stating, *hare-kṛṣṇeti mantere ṣoḍaśa-nāmātmanā dvātrimśad akṣareṇa mantreṇa ucchair uchārītena sphurita kṛta nṛtya rasanā jihvā yasya saḥ*, “When one uses one's tongue to loudly chant the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa which consists of sixteen words or thirty-two syllables (called the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra) it rewards one liberation from this material world.” It is found in the (2.3.62) about how Lord Kṛṣṇa's holy name affects all of the senses of the body even though only one of the senses is used for chanting. It states:

*ekasminn indriye prādurbhūtarām nāmāmṛtam rasaiḥ
āplāvayati sarvāṇīndriyāṇī madhurair nijaiḥ*

“The holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa is so transcendently surcharged by Lord Kṛṣṇa that just by using only one active sense (the tongue), or just only by using one sense (sense of hearing), or just by using one sense of the body (the eyes) to read the holy names, it benefits all of the senses along with the soul. That is why only the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra is called the liberating mantra.”

THE PURIFYING EFFECT OF CHANTING THE HOLY NAME

*śrī pūrvo narasiṁho dvir jayad uttaratas tu saha
triḥ sapta kṛtvā japatas tu mahābhaya nivāraṇaḥ*

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"If someone chants the name of Lord Nr̄siṁhadeva twenty-one times, by putting Śrī before the name of Nr̄siṁhadeva and also chants jaya jaya before repeating Nr̄siṁhadeva (*Śrī Nr̄siṁha, jaya Nr̄siṁha, jaya jaya Nr̄siṁha* etc.), that person becomes free from a tremendous amount of fear." (Kūrma Purāṇa)

Just as a lioness is very fearsome to everyone but she is very kind to her own cubs, similarly Lord Nr̄siṁhadeva is tremendously frightening to the materialists and demons but is very merciful to His Prahlāda-like pure devotees. Any devotee can pray to Lord Nr̄siṁhadeva in this way: *śrī-nr̄siṁha jaya nr̄siṁha jaya jaya nr̄siṁha, prahlādeśa jaya padmā mukha-padmā bhṝngi.* "I pay my obeisances to Lord Nr̄siṁhadeva! I humbly pray to and glorify Lord Nr̄siṁhadeva, who is the Lord of Prahlāda Mahārāja and, like the honey bee, is always engaged in taking care of His loving devotees. He also likes to behold the lotus-like face of the Goddess of Fortune."

*vartamānantu yat pāparāṁ yad bhūtaṁ yad bhaviṣyati
tat sarvāṁ nirdahatyāsu govindānala-kīrtanāt*

"All of one's past, present, and future sins are turned into ashes by chanting the fiery holy name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Govinda." (Laghu Bhāgavatāmṛtam)

The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa states that by chanting "Govinda, Govinda," one can remove more sins than by performing a *chāndrāyaṇa* fast (a fast for one month following the phases of the moon in which one decreases and increases their food as the moon wanes and waxes). The names of Lord Kṛṣṇa are so potent that by sincerely chanting the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa even once, one attains more merits than by performing great austerities, by performing ritualistic activities, or visiting holy places of pilgrimage. Therefore considering the chanting of Lord

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Kṛṣṇa's names to be equal to any kind of pious activity like giving charity to the Brāhmaṇas, opening charitable hospitals or educational institutions, distributing free food, and so on, is an offense.

*govindeti mudā yuktaḥ kīrtayed yastu ananya-dhīḥ
pāvanena ca dhanyena teneyam prthavī dhṛtā*

"Anyone who, with a pleasing attitude, sincerely chants the holy name of Lord Govinda becomes so glorious and purified that even Mother Earth feels happy to hold that devotee upon her, because by the help of that devotee the whole world can attain liberation." (Laghu Bhāgavatāmṛtam)

By chanting the Pañcha-tattva mantra, one increases one's taste for chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra and also develops five wonderful qualities, such as knowing one's own constitutional position as a spirit soul, experiencing everlasting bliss, understanding one's qualitative oneness with the Supreme Lord, becoming well-versed in spiritual knowledge, and becoming attractive to and friendly towards everyone. This is the result of chanting the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Śrī Sūta Goswāmī said, *acyutānanta govinda nāma uccāraṇa bheṣajāt, naśyanti sakalān rogān satyam satyam vadamy aham*: "O sages, if one chants the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is also called Achyuta, Ananta, and Govinda, while taking medicines, then, I repeatedly say in truth, all their diseases will surely be removed" (Agnī Purāṇa).

One need not ask the Lord for anything because if one chants offenselessly, all their desires are automatically fulfilled and problems go away. One should be convinced of this, just as a healthy person is sure to automatically receive energy from eating. It does not matter whether one is a chanter or just listens to the Lord's names, the Lord enters in their heart and frees them from distress.

OFFENSES AGAINST CHANTING

*mama nāmāni loke 'smin ṣraddhayā yastu kīrtayet
tasya aparādha kotiṣtu kṣamāmy eva na sariṣayāḥ*

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said, "If any person in this world continuously chants My names, even though they may not have enough faith in the chanting, still I remove millions of their committed sins without a doubt." (Viṣṇu-yamala)

Either with faith or without enough faith, one just needs to carry on chanting the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa because by continuing their chanting one will develop faith in chanting in due course and thus receive the blessings of the Lord. Since faithless chanting gradually turns into faithful chanting, there is never any loss in chanting the holy names. There are no sins in this world that cannot be nullified by chanting the holy name of the Supreme Lord. Even though such is the case with the Lord's holy names, there are no hard and fast rules for chanting the holy names. They can be chanted by any person, at any time, in any place, in any circumstance, and in all conditions. Chanting of the holy names includes all mantras and the complete study of the scriptures. The name of Lord Kṛṣṇa is the essence of all the Vedas and much more. Therefore, in the Viṣṇu-sahaśra-nāma-stotra, Lord Śiva tells Goddess Pārvatī, "O dear wife, three names of Lord Rāma are equal to one name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and one thousand names of Lord Viṣṇu are equal to one name of Lord Rāma." Therefore chanting Lord Kṛṣṇa's name just once equals three thousand names of Lord Visnu (or Narayana) and is equal to repeating Rama's names three times. Furthermore, Vālamīki Rāmāyaṇa states, *rāma rāma rāmeti madhure madhurākṣaram, āruhya kavītā sākhā vande vālmiki kohilāḥ*: "Lord Rāma's name is composed of the sweetest syllables.

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Therefore, one should repeat it loudly with a sweet voice and chant 'Rāma, Rāma, Rāma,' (equaling one of Lord Kṛṣṇa's names) like a cuckoo singing on the highest note."

*arthavāda harer nāmni sambhāvayati yo naraḥ
sa pāpiṣṭho manusyānāṁ niraye patati sphuṭam*

"Among all humans, the most sinful is that person who gives their own interpretation on the holy name of Lord Harī. Such a person certainly falls into hell." (Kātyāyana Saṁhitā)

The holy name of the most ancient Lord is not a modern creation. One's chanting will be most effective if one follows the standard rules. The holy name of the Lord is an incarnation of the Lord, and even the Vedas cannot perfectly explain it. The incarnation of the holy name is filled with all kinds of transcendental bliss, and it has emanated directly from the lotus mouth of Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. Even if a common man researches and speculates for millions of births, he will not understand its inner meaning. Unless one is a devotee and is blessed by the Lord, one cannot understand the meaning of the holy name, even if one is a learned scholar. When one humbly says, "O Supreme Lord, I am unable to pray to You properly, but please let me chant Your holy name," this kind of plea is the only process to understand the meaning of the holy name properly. Otherwise, one will commit offenses by giving their own interpretation of it. To chant the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, one does not need to speculate on the philosophical aspects of chanting.

*śruti-smṛti-purāṇeṣu nāma māhātmya vāciṣu
ye 'rtha vāda iti brūyur na teṣāṁ niraya kṣayāḥ*

"Anyone who gives their own interpretation on the glorious holy name of the Lord or on the śruti (the Vedas, the

Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā) and *smṛti* (all the Purāṇas and the Mahābhārat) scriptures, or says that they are false, never becomes free from hellish conditions.” (Jaiminī Saṁhitā)

The chanting of the holy names is so potent that it can remove even unlimited sins, but to achieve the full benefit of chanting, one must avoid offenses, which are described in the scriptures. If offenses of chanting are avoided, then there is no question of that person falling into hell no matter how much sins were committed before starting the chanting. The offenses make one sinful, but when the Supreme Personality of Godhead becomes pleased, then all sins become nullified. All kinds of offenses, including offenses committed while worshipping the Lord or committed while chanting, become nullified by the continuous chanting of the holy name of the Lord. Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu told Subuddhī Rāya, “Just begin the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra, and when your chanting is almost pure, all your reactions will go away. And when you chant perfectly, you will develop the taste for chanting and will obtain shelter at the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa.” Although the holy name of the Lord is all-beneficial and pleasing, if one chants offensively or gives their personal interpretation on it, then certainly they become degraded. Therefore, one should chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra under the guidance of a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master for the best results.

Sage Sanat-Kumāra instructs Nārada Muni about the potency of the holy name: “If anyone who has committed offenses at the lotus feet of Lord Harī takes shelter of chanting His holy name, all their offenses subside.” Continuous chanting is the only remedy to nullify the committed offenses against chanting. Keeping the beads on the middle of one’s ring finger, one should chant in a murmuring voice. Chanting *japa* with the index finger is forbidden in the scriptures. It is recommended that one chant *japa* while moving the beads inwards, or towards

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the heart. One should not jump over the head bead, if one does so then one will not receive benefit from the chanting.

*man-nāma kīrtana phālām vividham niśamya
na śraddadhāti manute yadutārthavādaṁ
yo mānusas tama iha duḥkha ca ye kṣipāmi
samsāra ghora vividhārtti nipiḍitāṅgam*

The Supreme Personality of Godhead says, "If a person, even though he hears the glories of chanting My holy name in congregation but has no faith in it, thinks that such glories are exaggerated, I mercilessly drown such a person into the whirlpool of ocean-like material existence ceaselessly in many different ways." (Kātyāyana Saṁhitā)

*nāmāparādha yuktānāṁ nāmāny eva haranty aghāṁ
aviśrānti prayuktāni tany evārtha karāni ca*

"The only process of atonement to counteract offenses against the holy name of the Lord is to continue chanting the holy name. By continuous chanting, one gradually receives the real result of chanting." (Padma Purāṇa)

After searching throughout all the Vedic scriptures, one will not find another spiritual method which is more sublime for this age of Kaliyuga than the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra. Therefore chanting the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa is the only solution to obtain salvation in life.

*bhaktir asya bhajanāṁ tad iḥāmutra upādhi nairāśyeṇa
amusminmāṇaḥ kalpanāṁ etad eva ca naiskarmyam*

"Chanting the holy name of the Lord and always remaining favorable to chanting the holy name is called devotion to the Lord. This kind of chanting will free one from all kinds of

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personal aggrandizement along with sensual pleasures and establish one on the spiritual platform of transcendental consciousness." (Gopālatāpanī-pūrvā Upaniṣad 18)

The spiritual world is three-fourths of the entire creation of the Lord and it is eternal, unlimitedly pleasing, beyond material understanding, immeasurable, and is predominated by pure goodness. It is transcendental because it is the personal abode of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, where only pure devotees reach to reside and only chanting the Lord's holy name will make one pure enough to reach there.

*mama nāmāni loke 'smin śraddhayā yas tu kīrtayet
tasyāparādha koṭis tu kṣamāmy eva na saṁśayah*

"If anyone chants My holy names with faith, I will certainly forgive that person for millions of their offenses. Of this there is no doubt." (Padma Purāṇa)

There is no need to wait for the proper time, place, circumstances, or purification of mind to chant the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The name of Lord Kṛṣṇa is fully pure, perfect, and not dependent on any other spiritual system. It completely satisfies the chanter's desires. For anyone who has Lord Govinda in their heart in the form of chanting His holy name, Kaliyuga turns into Satyayuga for that devotee, but for a rascal who is averse to chanting Satyayuga acts as if it is Kaliyuga.

*aghacchiṇāt smaranāṁ visnur bāhu ayāseṇa sādhyate
oṣṭha ṣpandana mātreṇa kīrtanāṁ tu tato vāram
tena janma iṣataih pūrva vāsudevah samarcitah
tānmukhe harināmāni sadā tiṣṭhanti bhārata*

"It is very easy to remember Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who kills demons and removes sins. Lord Kṛṣṇa's holy name, which is more powerful than He Himself, can be chanted simply by

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moving one's tongue and lips. Whosoever has worshiped Lord Kṛṣṇa for hundreds of births is able to chant His holy names purely in this life. Thus, by taking shelter at the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, offenses and sins become nullified." (Vaiṣṇava-chintāmaṇī)

How the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa is more powerful than He Himself is also found in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. Once when Lord Rāma was sitting on His throne with Mother Sītā, Lord Hanumān was massaging His lotus feet and was chanting His holy name nonstop, saying "Śrī Rāma, Śrī Rāma." The all-cognizant Lord, wanting everyone to know through His devotee that His holy name is more powerful than He Himself, asked Hanumān why he was chanting His name if He Himself is present. Hanumān replied, "O Lord, Your name is better than Yourself." To this Lord Rama said, "It is not possible." Hanumān said, "We have experienced it through our manifold experiments." The Lord then said, "I want to see how My name will protect you when I personally kill you." Discussing in this way, they both came out of the palace, and Lord Rāma began shooting sharp arrows at Hanumān to kill him. Hanumān was dancing in ecstasy with raised hands while chanting the Lord's holy name, "Śrī Rāma! Śrī Rāma!" All the residents of the city of Ayodhyā gathered to see Lord Rāma quarreling with His servant. Hanumān experienced the arrows of Lord Rāma as a shower of flowers. After some time, the Lord declared that Hanumān's statement was correct, that His holy name is actually more powerful than He Himself.

CHANTING THE GLORIES OF THE LORD

*āloḍya sarva śāstrāṇi vicārya ca punah punah
idam eva suniṣpannam dhyeyo nārāyaṇah sadā*

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Lord Brahmā told his son Nārada, "The Supreme Lord Himself has confirmed that after repeatedly scrutinizing all the scriptures and realizing them, one must conclude that one should meditate upon and chant the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the source of Lord Nārāyaṇa." (Skanda Purāṇa)

*harer nāma harer nāma harer nāmaiva kevalaṁ
kalau nāsty eva nāsty eva nāsty eva gatir anyathā*

"In this age of Kaliyuga there is no alternative, there is no alternative, there is no alternative for spiritual progress other than chanting the holy name, the holy name, the holy name of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa." (Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa)

*caitanya-nityānande nāhi e saba vicāra
nāma laite prema dena, bahe aśrudhāra*

"Lord Chaitanya and Lord Nityānanda did not discriminate between who was offensive and who was without offenses. They simply distributed the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa even if one had even slight faith in the holy name. But by continuous chanting they very quickly became cleansed from offenses, and thus, by the mercy of the two Lords, they experienced the ecstasy of love for Godhead." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Ādi 8.31)

*hare kṛṣṇa ityuccaiḥ sphurita rasano nāma gaṇanā-
kṛta granthī śrenī-śubhaga-kaṭisūtrojvala karah
viśālākṣo dīrghārgalayugala khelānīkita bhujah
sa caitanyah kim me punarapi dṛśor yaṣyati padam*

"He whose tongue loudly chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra, which consists of thirty-two syllables; who uses beads to count the chanted names, whose left shoulder is decorated with a bright and beautiful Brāhmaṇa thread, who has

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very broad eyes; and whose arms extend till His knees—may that Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu be the object of my vision.” (Stavamālā 1.5)

The Itihāsa-samuccchaya states, “Whoever with full faith worships, chants, and meditates on the glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who removes all problems of life, who is eternal, who also has a four-armed form and is known as Nārāyaṇa, Viśvaksena, and so on, reaches the infallible spiritual world, which is eternally glorified by all the scriptures.”

*aho ahobhir na kaler vidūyate
sudhā-sudhārā-madhuram̄ pade pade
dine dine candana-candra-śītalam̄
yaso yasodā tanayasya gīyate*

“O dear gentle personalities, any person who daily sings the transcendental glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the son of Yaśodā, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, which are a constant stream of transcendental sweetness, and which are more soothing and cooling than sandalwood paste and the full moon, is not tortured by the misgivings of Kaliyuga.” (Padyāvalī 4)

*aharniśam̄ smaraṇa nāmam̄ kṛṣṇam̄ paśyati cakṣusā
aśucir vā śucirvā 'pi sarva kāleṣu sarvadā*

“During the day and night, at all times and in all places, whether one is clean or unclean, in every circumstance, one should remember and chant the holy names of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa until one sees the Supreme Lord face-to-face with one’s own eyes.” (Padma Purāṇa, Pātāla khaṇḍa 80.7)

After drinking the nectar of devotional service of Lord Kṛṣṇa, if someone gives it up and goes back to material life, then that person should be understood to have committed offenses

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towards chanting the holy names of the Lord. Therefore, scriptures recommend that one should chant carefully, according to the rules and regulations, so that one can remain firmly attached to Lord Kṛṣṇa. In other words, a devotee becomes purified by offenseless chanting and thus becomes qualified. Besides this there is no other way to remain attached to and attracted to Lord Kṛṣṇa till one's death. One who cannot chant one's prescribed rounds faithfully and offenselessly cannot even claim to be a good devotee in the eyes of God, what to speak of giving spiritual initiation to others as a Guru. Therefore one must be a pure devotee who descended from the spiritual world to function as a Spiritual Master in the Gauḍīya Vaiśnava tradition of devotional service. As only a doctor knows who is a doctor, similarly, only a pure devotee knows who is a pure devotee. A pure devotee cannot be elected or selected by votes or by any means by incompetent devotees. Guru has to be a perfectly pure devotee. If one is truly interested in obtaining liberation from this world then they should be very careful while selecting their initiating Spiritual Master. If one is fortunate, they obtain a perfect Spiritual Master, thereby marching to the spiritual world where the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is the source of all hymns, personally resides. The spiritual world is free from all miseries. There is no need for the sunlight or moonlight, nor is there a need for the wind to blow. Death does not exist in the spiritual world, and it is all-auspicious, eternal, peaceful, and is praised by great demigods like Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva. It is meditated upon by great yogis, and once one reaches there, one never returns to this world to suffer.

*harir eva samārādhyaḥ sarva deve sureśvarah
hari nāma mahā mantrair naśyatpāpa piśācatām*

“One who takes shelter of chanting the Mahāmantra of Lord Śrī Hari, the Lord of all the Lords, surely removes all the

sins and the demoniac mentality from within the heart." (Padma Purāṇa, Svarga khaṇḍa 50.6)

Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, who appeared to propagate Kṛṣṇa consciousness in Kaliyuga, stated, "Singing the glories of the topmost Supreme Lord (Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa) is the ultimate goal of human life, the goal of austerities, the goal of studying scriptures, the goal of performing sacrifices, the goal of performing *sādhanā* (daily routine of spiritual activities), and the goal of giving charity." There is nothing more important in this age of Kaliyuga than chanting the holy names of God. Therefore Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, who is an incarnation of compassion in Kaliyuga, stated, *śṛtam apy upaniṣadaṁ dūre hari kathāmr̥tāt yan na śānti drava citta kampa aśru pulaka ādayaḥ*, "Even though one may be expert in knowing the Vedas and Upaniṣads, and may be Brahman realized, if his heart does not melt in ecstasy when he hears the nectarean narrations of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and if his body does not tremble, tears do not flow from his eyes, and hairs do not stand on end, he is situated far away from God." (Bhakti-sandarbha 120) A sincere devotee, in due course, experiences the real taste of chanting and feels ecstasy while chanting, *nāma gāne sadā ruci*. The holy name of Kṛṣṇa which includes sixteen words is called the Mahāmantra. Other mantras that are mentioned in the Nārada Pañcharātra are simply known as mantras, but the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa is called the Mahāmantra (the king of the mantras). The difference between mantras and the Mahamantra is that mantras can only be chanted silently whereas the Mahāmantra can be chanted silently and aloud as well. Mantras lose potency and create offense for the chanter if they are chanted aloud but the Mahāmantra does not include such offense, regardless of the way one chants.

*yathā yathā harer nāma kīrtyanti sma nārakāḥ
tathā tathā harau bhaktiṁ udvahanto divāṁ yayuḥ*

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“Even those who are suffering in hell become quickly liberated and promoted to the spiritual world as soon as they remember and chant the names of Lord Śrī Hari.” (Nrśimha Purāṇa)

We read in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam and other Vedic scriptures that Yamarāja ordered his messengers to stay far away from those people who sincerely chant the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa or sing His glories narrated in the Vedic scriptures. Those who are associated with such devotees also become free from their accumulated sins. Even in hell, where it is difficult to remember the name of the Lord due to excessive miseries, if anyone somehow remembers or chants the names of Lord Kṛṣṇa, they also become eligible for liberation. The holy names of the Lord are immensely potent.

*jīvitam viṣṇu bhaktaṣya varam pañca dināni vai
na tu kalpa sahaśrāṇi bhakti hīnasya keśave*

“Even five days of a dedicated devotee’s life is far more glorious than the whole life of one who is devoid of devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Even if that person lives for one thousand millenniums, it is a waste.” (Viṣṇu-dharmottara)

It is stated in the Padma Purāṇa that whosoever’s tongue vibrates the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, or whoever hears the holy names—whether chanted seriously, jokingly, or with neglect—certainly becomes purified, as did Ajāmila of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. On the other hand, if one chants the holy name to earn a livelihood, for receiving a payment, while disobeying the orders of the Spiritual Master, or while maintaining offenses against the holy name, then that chanting is not spiritually fruitful. But if, due to providence, such a person receives the mercy of a pure devotee, then that person also begins chanting offenselessly and gradually advances on the spiritual platform and becomes cleansed of misgivings.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR CHANTING

*apavitra karo nagnah śirasī pravṛto'pi vā
pralapan vā japed yāvat tāvan nispalam ucyate
ariguli agreṣu yajjapta yajjaptam meru laṅghane
asāṅkhyātañ ca yajjaptam tat sarvam niṣphalam bhavet*

Śrīla Vyāsadeva said, "Chanting *japa* does not bear much result if someone chants while in an impure condition, with dirty hands, without sitting on a seat, while naked, with a completely covered head and face, or while talking with someone. One should therefore be very careful while chanting their prescribed rounds. If someone chants *japa* holding the beads on the tips of their fingers, passes over the head bead, or chants without counting whatever rounds one has chanted, that chanting bears no results." (Vyāsa Smṛuti)

When Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu said that there are no hard and fast rules for chanting the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa, this does not mean that one can chant whatever way they want. However, the Lord's holy names are always purifying. Still, one has to follow the rules prescribed by an authentic Spiritual Master. In the beginning stage of chanting there are no hard and fast rules, but as one becomes purified by the chanting, one becomes able to gradually follow some standard rules to help achieve more and more purification. This system continues until one's chanting becomes perfect and offenseless. Anyone can begin chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra without any special qualifications, but ultimately one must follow the Vedic regulations to perfect the chanting. It is advised that one should chant their prescribed rounds of the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra on *japa-mālā* (chanting beads) without offenses and according to the Vaiṣṇava regulative principles.

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Ajāmila of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam was forgiven for his mistakes because he did not realize he was sinning. Therefore, if anyone does not know the standard rules and thus unconsciously makes mistakes, their mistakes are easily forgiven. But according to Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, speaking to Arjuna in the Garbha Gītā, one should not neglect learning the standards for chanting to avoid their obligation to following those rules.

*anāsanah śayāno vā gacchann utthita eva vā
rathyayāma śive sthāne na jāpet timirāntare
upānād gūḍha pādo vā yāna śayyāgatas tathā
prasārya na jāpet pādav utkaṭāsana eva vā*

“One should not chant one’s prescribed rounds of *japa* sitting on a bare floor, while standing, while falling asleep, while walking, in a dark place, in an impure place, such as in a maternity room, in crematoriums, or in the bathroom. Also, one should not chant *japa* while wearing shoes, while riding on a carrier, while sitting with spread legs, or while sitting on a dirty seat.” (Mantrārṇava)

The word *eva* (in the above text) emphasizes that one should never chant *japa* in dirty places or places influenced by ignorance or sin, such as near low-class animals, or places where sinful activities are performed. A devotee should be careful and follow the scriptural rules while chanting their prescribed rounds, but for congregational chanting with musical instruments, or when chanting extra rounds, there are some concessions. Five thousand years ago when Kaliśantaraṇa Upaniṣad was written, it stated, “Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare—these sixteen names of God, composed of thirty-two syllables, are the only means to counteract the evil effects of Kaliyuga.” This mantra is called the Mahāmantra (the king of all the mantras) and can be chanted loudly and also silently, as

well. Either way, it rewards purity and divine blessings to the chanter, but if other mantras are chanted loudly they result in the reverse of rewarding blessings.

*na pāda pādam ākramya na caiva hi tathā karau
na ca asamāhita manā na ca saṁśayano jāpet
na kampayet śiro grīvāṁ dantān naiva prakāśayet*

"While chanting *japa*, one should not cross one foot over the other or interlock one's arms, nor should one chant *japa* with an angry or disturbed mind. While chanting *japa*, one should not shake one's neck or head, nor should one intentionally expose their teeth to others." (Yājñavalkya Saṁhitā)

Crossing one foot over the other means to sit on the floor with the knees up and the feet crossed. One should very attentively listen to the sixteen words of the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra and meditate on the Lord carefully. Whimsical chanting is not allowed because one cannot attain pure love of Godhead in this way. By this way, it is very difficult to realize the Supreme Lord because even the great sages and demigods have difficulty realizing Him—not to speak of an ordinary person. Lord Kṛṣṇa is obtained by pure love, and this pure love is the result of pure chanting. If one chants regularly, it gradually makes one pure, and thus one attains love of Godhead and brings Lord Kṛṣṇa under control. Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura is an example of this, who by chanting purely, induced Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu to visit him on a daily basis. Although Haridāsa Ṭhākura was not even allowed in the Jagannātha temple, Lord Jagannātha Himself would come daily as Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu to see him and inquire about his well-being. He also would bring *prasādam* (holy food from Lord Jagannātha) for him. What a benediction pure chanting can reward, just see! God personally comes to visit His pure devotee.

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*yakṣa rākṣasa bhūtāni siddha vidyādharaḥ gaṇāḥ
haranti prasabham yasmāt tasmād guptam samācaret*

"If one chants *japa* while keeping the beads outside of the beadbags, then the results of one's *japa* are forcibly stolen by semi-demigods, demons, ghosts, siddhas (perfected beings from the upper planet, Siddhaloka), and Vidyādhara (the dancers in the heavenly planets). Therefore, one should not keep their *japa* beads outside of their beadbags." (Yājñavalkya Saṁhitā)

One should never show their beads to anyone, nor should one unnecessarily listen to others speak while chanting the prescribed rounds, nor should one break the prescribed laws of chanting. If, due to circumstance, one must speak to others, hear them speak, or chant with their left hand, then one should beg pardon from Lord Kṛṣṇa and chant extra rounds.

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī, in his *Digdarśinī-tīkā*, writes: "Chanting *japa* melodiously, with high and low sounds, where others can hear every sound vibration clearly is called *svarita* (melodious) chanting. One should chant clearly; but better than chanting *japa* out loud and clearly is to chant *japa* in such a way so that it can be heard only by oneself, and this chanting is called *upānśu* (murmuring) in quality. When one, by their intelligence, carefully meditates on the names of the Lord, one word after another, systematically, and repeats the Mahāmantra again and again, it is called chanting within the mind. *Upānśu* chanting is one hundred times better than *svarita* chanting, and chanting within the mind is one thousand times better than *svarita* chanting. Chanting within the mind is done with the help of a particular nerve called *suśumṇā*, which produces no sound. This chanting is called the best in quality."

It is stated in the Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa that there are three kinds of chanting: chanting with a sound vibration, chanting in a murmuring way, and chanting within the mind. These three kinds of chanting are respectively better than the previous one.

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Therefore, chanting within the mind is the best of all, but it requires a great amount of practice. One should try to avoid imitating a pure devotee who may be chanting by using the *suśumṇā* nerve, which brings out no sound whatsoever.

*nadoṣo mānase jāpe sarva deśe 'pi sarvadā
japa niṣṭho dvija śreṣṭhaḥ sarva yajñā phalam labhet
aśucir vā śucir vāpi gacchan tiṣṭhan śvapann api
mantraiva śaraṇo vidvān manasaiva sadābhyaṣet*

"In all conditions and at all times, one should try to chant *japa* in one's mind because such chanting is faultless and reaps maximum results. Therefore, anyone who chants this kind of *japa* receives the results of performing all kinds of sacrifices. Whatever one's condition may be, whether purified or unpurified, whether walking, motionless (standing or sitting), laying down, or even while resting, one should take complete refuge of chanting *japa* and slowly develop the practice to chant within one's mind." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 17.161, 162)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī remarks in this connection, "One should chant *japa* within one's mind because chanting *japa* in that way is the best of all kinds of chanting. In all conditions, one should take shelter of chanting *japa*, regardless of the time, place, or circumstance. This is the understanding here." (Digdarśinī-tīkā)

Chanting *japa* is the only solution for people who are struggling in Kaliyuga with the problems arising from their bodies and mind. But one should chant their prescribed rounds following as many rules of chanting as possible. No one is discouraged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but all are encouraged instead to chant and follow as many rules as they can to chant. As long as one is not purified, one should chant *japa* with either a murmuring sound or out loud. Otherwise, the restless mind may create problems.

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*japena devatā nityam stūyamāna prasīdati
praśānna vipulān bhogān dadyām muktiś ca śāśvatīm*

"If one regularly chants *japa* in the mood of pleasing the Supreme Lord, the Lord Himself, being pleased with that devotee, rewards one with complete happiness while alive in this world and later rewards liberation after death." (Padmanābhīya Saṁhitā)

ataḥ kuryād japaṁ nityam śaktyā niyata śarikhyayā

"According to one's capacity and to the best of one's ability, one should regularly chant a fixed number of rounds each day." (Nārada Pañcharātra)

One should never reduce their promised quota of *japa*, but should gradually increase it as far as possible. When the fixed number of rounds is completed, one should then engage in other services for the Lord. Generally, we recommend that our disciples chant at least sixteen rounds on their *japa* beads daily, and this amount should be completed daily. At the time of going to sleep at night, a devotee must check if they have completed their prescribed number of rounds for that day. If not, then they should complete their rounds before going to sleep. This is the Vedic etiquette of a sincere devotee. If, by chance, due to some unexpected reasons, one is unable to complete their sixteen rounds on that day, then the devotee must make it up on the next day. But this should not become a habit for any reason, thinking it to be a license to act as per one's wish. This will implicate the disciple with an offense, which is detrimental to spiritual advancement. A devotee must, in all circumstance, be sure to keep their given vow to their Spiritual Master. Even in Kaliyuga, if the Guru is scripturally authentic, he will not let his disciples go astray in any way, and to correct their mistakes, he will fearlessly chastise his disciples so they act properly.

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*vācakāṁ tu eka guṇikam upānśu śatam ucyate
sahaśram mānasam proktam̄ trividham̄ japa lakṣaṇam̄*

"There are three ways to chant *japa*. Those who chant out loud receive one times the benefit. Those who chant murmuring and just moving their lips receive one hundred times more benefit than the previous kind of chanting. But those who chant within their mind only they obtain one thousand times the benefit of chanting *japa* out loud." (Rāma-Paddhatī)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī states in his Dīgdarśinī commentary, "Chanting within one's mind is ten times better than murmuring chanting, which is one hundred times better than chanting out loud. Therefore it is best to practice to reach the desired stage of chanting gradually. One should not be hasty in reaching that stage. That stage should come automatically through the regular practice of chanting."

CONTROLLING LORD HARI BY CHANTING HIS HOLY NAMES

*jitan tena jitan tena jitan tena iti niścitarī
jihvāgre vartate yasya harir iti akṣara dvayam̄*

Prahlāda Mahārāja said, "If anyone has the two syllables 'ha' and 'rī' on the tip of their tongue, that person undoubtedly has control over Lord Harī (a name of Lord Kṛṣṇa)." (Viṣṇu-dharma)

Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī has described that the unlimited potency and the sweetness of the holy name cannot be sufficiently appreciated by one's single mouth and tongue. Therefore, one needs millions of tongues to chant the two nectarean syllables, 'Kṛṣ' and 'ṇa'. The Skanda Purāṇa and the Padma Purāṇa state that chanting of the holy name of Lord

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Kṛṣṇa is sweeter than the sweetest, it is more auspicious than the most auspicious things in this world, and is the eternal fruit of the sacred vine-like Vedas. If someone chants it just once, either with faith or without faith, or even with disrespect, it rewards benefit. Just as touching fire in any way burns, so is the effect of chanting the Lord's holy names.

Particularly in the present age of Kaliyuga, people are mostly very lazy and misguided, and thus are considered to be unlucky. Therefore, for such a class of people, Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu introduced the chanting process of the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra for their deliverance, and only those who are the most fortunate participate in it.

*īnam etat pravṛddham me hṛdayān nopasarpati
yad govindeti cukroṣā kṛṣṇa mām durvāsinām*

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said, "Draupadī had called Me, saying, 'O Govinda, I am Yours, please save me,' I became greatly indebted to her and this feeling does not leave My heart." (Mahābhārat)

When a person realizes that due to some reason they became separated from the Lord, and thinking this, sincerely cries out, "O Govinda, I am Yours, please be kind and accept my service!"—at that moment, the Supreme Lord becomes very attached to that devotee and becomes obliged to immediately respond as He did for Draupadi. In other words, the Lord intensely and lovingly thinks of His crying devotee. He is such a faithful and honest Master. Leaving such an honest Master aside and praying to someone else is like leaving a lump of gold for a piece of brass. But, one must first learn how to genuinely cry for Lord Kṛṣṇa. This stage will surely be reached by regularly chanting the Mahāmantra: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare / Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu told Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭāchārya,

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eka kṛṣṇa nāme kare sarva pāpa kṣaya: "Just once repeating one name of 'Krsna' removes all the sins of a sinner." Such is the potency of repeating Lord Kṛṣṇa's holy name.

The Sāmudrika Śāstra states, *govindeti sadā dhyānam* *govindeti sadā japaḥ*; *govindeti sadā snānam* *sadā govinda kīrtanam*: "A devotee should always meditate on Lord Govinda, always chant the names of Lord Govinda, always dive and bathe in the ocean-like nectar-water of Lord Govinda's holy name, and always chant the name of Lord Govinda congregationally with musical instruments." This is the secret to success.

COMPARATIVE RESULTS OF CHANTING DIFFERENT NAMES OF THE LORD

*viṣṇor ekaika nāmapi sarva vedādhikam matam
tadṝig nāma sahaśreṇa rāma nāma samāṁ smṛtam*

"One name of Lord Viṣṇu rewards greater results than anything else that is available in the Vedic literatures. Furthermore, one name of Lord Rāma is equal to one thousand names of Lord Viṣṇu." (Padma Purāṇa)

It is stated in the Vāmana Purāṇa that any person can attain the spiritual world if that person chants the holy name of Lord Hari, who Himself is the benedicting personality, who is addressed as the lotus-naveled Lord, who holds a conchshell, club, disc, and a lotus flower in His hands, who wears nice golden garments, holds a bow and arrows, and whose eyes are reddish like lotus petals. The person who meditates like this is addressed as a devotee.

*rāma rāma rāmeti rame rāme monorame
sahasra-nāma tat tulyam Śrī rāma-nāmo varānane*

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Lord Śiva said to his wife Pārvatī, "O beautiful one, one thousand names of Lord Viṣṇu are equal to one name of Lord Rāma and three names of Lord Rāma are equal to one name of Lord Kṛṣṇa." (Mahābhārat)

*sahasra namnam punyanam trir avrtyat tu yat phalam
ekavrtyat tu krsnasya namaikam tat prayacchatī*

"Whatever merit is earned by chanting three times one thousand meritorious names of Lord Viṣṇu is gained by chanting just once one name of Lord Kṛṣṇa." (Padma Purāṇa)

The Ādi Purāṇa states that even a person who just appreciates or becomes pleased by seeing a devotee chanting Lord Kṛṣṇa's holy names achieves the Lord's transcendental mercy so as to march forward towards the spiritual world to enjoy sporting with the Lord there. Communion with the Lord by transmission of the transcendental sound vibration is non-different from the Lord Himself. It is the shortest, complete and perfect method for approaching the Lord. This means chanting Lord Kṛṣṇa's holy names is the true remedy for solving all kinds of miseries.

It is stated in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa that whatever could be attained in Satyayuga by meditation, in Tretāyuga by performing fire sacrifices, and in Dvāparayuga by gorgeously worshiping Lord Kṛṣṇa can be achieved in Kaliyuga just by chanting His holy names.

*kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa iti kṛṣṇa iti yo mām smarati nityaśāḥ
jalarāṁ bhītvā yathā padmarāṁ narakād uddhārayāmy aham*

"If a person chants My name, saying, 'Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa,' I deliver that person from the hellish conditions of life and uplift that soul as does a lotus flower that rises up above the water." (Nr̄siṁha Purāṇa)

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If one even once offenselessly repeats the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Lord Kṛṣṇa gives that person full protection from danger. There is an example in the Mahābhārat that when Draupadī was being forcibly disrobed by Duḥsāsana, she helplessly cried out, "O Govinda, please help me," and He immediately gave her an unlimited supply of *saris* thus protecting her from becoming humiliated before the assembly. Another time, when Durvāsā Muni reached the Pāñḍavas' place while in exile with his hungry disciples, the sincere plea of Draupadī brought Lord Kṛṣṇa there to save them from the severe curse of Durvāsā. This is the result of even once repeating the Lord's holy name offenselessly. The result of chanting offenselessly brings transcendental symptoms in the body by melting the heart and making the hairs stand on end while calling out for Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī says, "If this transcendental reaction does not take place in one, even after continuous hearing and chanting of the holy name of the Lord for a long time, then it must be understood that it is due to offenses only." The holy name of the Lord—Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare / Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare—is a transcendental sound vibration because it comes from the transcendental platform, the supreme abode of Lord Kṛṣṇa. It does not belong to this material world: *golokera prema-dhana hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana*.

CHANTING JAPA OR GĀYATRI ON THE FINGERS

*kaniṣṭhā anāmikā madhyā caturthī tarjanī matā
tiśro'ṅgulyas triparvāḥ syur madhyamā ca eka parvikā
parva dvayam madhyamāyā japakāle vivarjayet
evam merum vijānīyād brahmaṇā dūṣitam svayam*

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*ārabhyān anāmikā madhyāt pradakṣiṇām anukramāt
tarjanī mūla paryantam kramāt daśaṣu parvaṣu*

"For counting the chanting of the holy names or for counting the Gāyatri mantras on one's fingers, the scriptures allow the usage of the little finger, ring finger, middle finger, and index finger only. Among them, one section of the middle finger, and three sections of the other three fingers are allowed to be used for the counting. When one is counting the chanting, one should not use the lower two sections of the middle finger because these two sections of the middle finger are rejected for use by Lord Brahmā himself. If one chants by using the hand, then one should begin counting one's chanting from the middle section of the ring finger, come down, and then systematically move clockwise until one reaches the root of the index finger. In this way, one should count their chanting on ten finger sections." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 17.118, 118, 119)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī remarks (Digdarśinī-tīkā) that only three full fingers should be used and not the lower two sections of the middle finger. If one follows this rule of chanting, one will attain the merit of chanting. It is also found in the Gautamiya Tantra that a devotee is not allowed to touch the beads with their left hand and should not let the beads slip from the fingers while chanting. If somehow the beads slip from the hand then one should start that round again. A devotee should not count less than one round. If one is unable to complete a round and has to leave the round for an emergency situation then that devotee has to start chanting that round from the beginning again. One must always wash the hands, and if possible, take āchamana before beginning to chant *japa*.

*ārabhyān anāmikā mūlāt parivarteta vai kramāt
tarjanī madhya paryantam japed daśaṣu parvaṣu*

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"Beginning from the middle of the ring finger and continuing clockwise to the root of the index finger, one should chant on these ten finger parts only." (Gautamīya)

The broad spaces seen in between the lines of the fingers are called *parvata* (sections) in Sanskrit. The two lower sections of the ring finger, three sections of the little finger, the tips of the ring and middle fingers, and the three sections of the pointer finger are to be used for counting one's chanting. Starting with the middle section of the ring finger, one should come down to the root of the ring finger and then go up from the bottom of the little finger till the tip of the little finger, then to the tip of the ring finger and then to the tip of the middle finger and then come down from the tip of the pointing finger to the root of the index finger. This is the correct way to chant on fingers. Only the right hand is allowed to chant mantras and the Mahāmantra. The left hand is not allowed unless there is something wrong with the right hand. While chanting on fingers, one should keep the palm towards the heart and must cover the hand with a cloth before beginning the chanting. This is the Vedic system for chanting.

Thus ends the Sixth Chapter of the Vrajavāsī Realization.

DEVOTIONAL SERVICE



शुचिवाऽशुचिवापि सर्वकालेषु सर्वदा ।
अहर्निशं सेवनं भक्तिं कृष्णं पश्यति चक्षुषाः ॥८॥

*Śucir vā 'śucir vāpi sarva kāleṣu sarvadā
aharniśa sevanam bhaktim krṣṇam paśyati cakṣusāḥ*

Whether one is clean or unclean, in all circumstances, one should practice devotional service all the time until one sees Kṛṣṇa face to face.

The Vedic scriptures conclude that the eternal constitutional position of the living entity is to serve the Supreme Lord and that Lord is Lord Kṛṣṇa. Lord Kṛṣṇa and His incarnations teach the science of practical devotional service based on the theoretical knowledge presented in the Bhagavad Gītā, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, and other Vedic scriptures. Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, who is non-different from Lord Kṛṣṇa, taught by His practical example about how to follow the teachings of the Vedas and engage in the service of the Supreme Lord.

The subtle activities of the mind are expressed through the gross senses. These activities are used either to acquire transcendental knowledge to please God or for gross and subtle sense gratification to degrade oneself. One can elevate oneself to the kingdom of God only through the process of devotional service. The ultimate goal of a real devotee is to please Lord

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Kṛṣṇa, and no other purifying processes, besides devotional service, can satisfy Lord Kṛṣṇa as quickly as devotional service. Therefore it is said:

*ārādhita yadi haris tapasā tataḥ kim
nārādhito yadi haris tapasā tataḥ kim
antar bahi yadi haris tapasā tataḥ kim
nāntar bahi yadi haris tapasā tataḥ kim*

“If one has worshipped and pleased Lord Kṛṣṇa, then what is the need of performing any other austerity, and if one has not worshipped and pleased Lord Kṛṣṇa, then what is the use of performing austerities? If the presence of Lord Kṛṣṇa is realized to be inside and outside of oneself, then what is the use of performing any further austerity? But if Lord Kṛṣṇa is not realized internally or externally, then what is the use of one’s austerity?” (Nārada Pañcharātra)

Thus, those devotees who are fixed (like Prahlāda, Dhruva, Vidura, Kuntīdevī, and Harīdāsa Ṭhākura) execute devotional service until they see Lord Kṛṣṇa face-to-face. This is the motto of a real devotee.

BENEFITS OF DEITY WORSHIP

*smaranam kīrtanam vāpi darśanam sparśanam tathā
sambhāṣanam ca kurute rājasūyādhikam phalam*

“By remembering, chanting, seeing, touching, and discussing about the worship of the Deity of the Supreme Lord, one attains the result of performing a *rājasūya* sacrifice (a grand sacrifice performed by an emperor at the time of coronation to obtain tribute from other kings so as to have undisputed

sovereignty)." (Kulārṇava-rahaṣya 3)

UNDEVIATING DEVOTIONAL SERVICE

*pratiṣṭhitā arccā na tyājyā yāvat jīvam samarcayet
varaṁ prāṇa parityāgaḥ śiraso vā pi kartanam*

"If the deities are installed properly, the worship should carry on and should not be stopped as long as one is alive. One should rather give up one's life or have one's head cut off than to give up the worship." (Hayaśīrṣa Pañcharātra)

*bhakti grāhyo hrṣikeśo na dhanair dharanī-surāḥ
bhaktyā sampūjito viṣṇuḥ pradadāti samīhitam*

"The Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is also called Hṛṣīkeśa (the controller of the senses), can be attained only through devotional service. He cannot be won over just by giving charity. If one worships Him with devotion, He fulfills the desires of the worshipper." (Nāradīya Purāṇa)

Lord Kṛṣṇa is bought through devotion and not just by opulent worship. (See the Glossary under Satyabhāmā) The Deity form of the Lord is not a statue, because the Deity reciprocates with His sincere devotees. It is stated in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, "In and around the time of Tretāyuga the learned sages and saintly people saw that generally people mutually dealt disrespectfully among themselves. To rectify this situation they installed the Lord's Deity form in the temple and introduced worshipping with different paraphernalia to obtain perfection." The worshipping rule of the Lord's Deity is that one should sit on a nice seat near the Deity and face either East or North.

Furthermore, there are many immutable instructions

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regarding service to the Lord. In the Varāha Purāṇa, Lord Varāha said to Mother Earth, "I like copper utensils in My worship, and I do not much appreciate utensils made out of gold, silver, and bell metal. Among all purified metals, copper is very pure and auspicious. By using such utensils for My worship, the worshipper cuts the tie to this material world. O Earth, it is the duty of an initiated and purified person who is worshiping Me to use copper pots for My worship, because they are very pleasing to Me."

A devotee should not have any material craving to ask the Lord to fulfill while worshipping the Deity. The Lord is the greatest and material things are petty items which decay in due course. Thus, asking the Supreme Lord for material things is like a person who asks a rich person for some ashes. The Viṣṇudharmottara states that if a materially desirous person offers anything in worship, the Lord does not give that much value to the offering; but if a desireless person offers anything to Him, He values it greatly.

LIBERATION THROUGH DEVOTIONAL SERVICE

*śrī viṣṇoh śravaṇe parīkṣid abdhavad vaiyāsakīḥ kīrtane
prahlādah smaraṇe tadarīghri bhajane lakṣmīḥ prthuḥ pūjane
akruras tu abhivandane kāpi-patir dāsyē'tha sākhye'rjunaḥ
sarvas tv ātma-nivedane balir abhūt kṛṣṇāptir eṣām param*

"If devotional service is executed properly, the Supreme Lord accepts it even if it is just one of a kind, still He rewards the devotee with the ultimate goal of life called liberation. For example, Parīkṣit Mahārāja achieved liberation just by hearing about the Lord; Śrī Śukadeva Goswāmī received liberation just by speaking about the Lord; Prahlāda received liberation just by

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remembering the Lord; Lakṣmīdevī is liberated just because She massages the Lord's lotus feet; and Pṛthu Mahārāja received it just by worshiping the Lord. Akrūra achieved liberation just by offering prayers to the Lord; Lord Hanumān achieved liberation just by serving Him; by becoming a friend, Arjuna achieved liberation; and by offering all of his possession to the Lord, Bali Mahārāja achieved liberation. Thus, just by executing a particular type of devotional service, each of these personalities achieved liberation" (Padyāvalī 53).

DEITY WORSHIP AND ENVY DO NOT GO WELL TOGETHER

*etena tadṛśa doṣa yukteṣu api kārya sādhakatvāt
śrīmad arcāyādhikyam eva vyāñjitam "pratimā
svalpa buddhīnām" ity atra ca alpa buddhīnām
api ity arthah, -nṛsiṁha purāṇādau brahmā
ambarīṣādīnām api tat pūjā śravaṇāt*

"If someone still retains an envious nature even after worshiping the Deity of the Supreme Lord, then it should be understood that their worship of the Deity did not yield sufficient results. Some less intelligent people (such as the Māyāvādīs) think that Deity worship is meant for childish people to obtain benefits to becomes wise and relinquish unwanted qualities, but this is not so. In other words, the impersonalists (who do not believe that God has a form) say, 'Only the childish and less intelligent people need to worship the Deity, and when they become grown up and learned, they do not need to worship the Deity anymore.' This statement is inaccurate because it is clearly stated in the Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa that it is well known that Lord Brahmā, Ambarīṣa Mahārāja, and many other great people worshiped the Deity form of the Lord and stated that the Deity

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of the Lord and the Lord Himself are one and the same—and thus nondifferent.” (Bhakti-sandarbha-tīkā 919)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī remarks, “Wherever the Supreme Lord’s Deity is established according to the Vedic principles, even if the temple is difficult to reach, one should still go to see the Lord’s Deity and worship Him” (Digdarśinī-tīkā 11.63). Śrīla Viśvanātha Chakravarti Ṭhākura stated, “If someone cannot appreciate the activities of a pure devotee who is authorized by the ancient scriptures, then the Deity worship is the only chance for obtaining emancipation from this world.” If the worship is sincerely and purely performed, then the Lord is never dissatisfied with that devotional service.

FLOWERS FIT TO OFFER TO THE DEITY

*puṣpair aranya sambhūtais tathā nagara sambhavaiḥ
aparyyūṣita-niśchidraiḥ prokṣitair jantu varjitaiḥ
ātmārāmaudbhavair vā pi pūtaiḥ sampūjayed harim*

“Whether flowers are naturally grown in the forest, grown around habitation, or grown within one’s own garden, if they are fresh, not withered or broken up, are washed, and do not include any kind of bugs, insects, or worms—such flowers should be used to worship the Deity of the Supreme Lord Harī.” (Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa)

*mālatī tulasi padmānārī ketakī manī puṣpakaṁ
kadamba kuṣumāṁ lakṣmīḥ kaustubhaṁ keśava priyāṁ
kanṭakīnyāpi deyāni śuklāni surabhīni ca
tathā raktāni deyāni jalajāni dvijottama*

“Mālatī (white jasmine), Tulasi, lotuses, woodapple,

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Maṇipuṣpa, and Kadamba flowers are as dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa as are Lakṣmīdevī and the Kaustubha gem.” (Skanda Purāṇa)

Prahlāda Mahārāja says in the Vāmana Purāṇa, “One should use good quality flowers with a naturally sweet fragrance to worship the Supreme Lord.” Lord Brahmā said to Nārada in the Skanda Purāṇa, “As traditional Brāhmaṇas are the highest of the social orders, as the Ganges is the best among all the holy places of pilgrimages, and as Lord Viṣṇu is the fountainhead of all the demigods, similarly, among flowers Mālatī flowers (white jasmine) are the best. Any person who worships Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the rider of Garuḍa, with Mālatī flowers becomes liberated from the cycle of birth and death.” Nārada Muni says in the Garuḍa Purāṇa, “The Supreme Lord becomes more happy with an offering of Mālatī flowers than by the performance of one thousand sacrifices.” The Skanda Purāṇa states that in the month of Kārtika any person who worships Lord Kṛṣṇa with Mālatī flowers becomes free from all sins.

*na śīrṇa dalaiḥ śliṣṭair na āśubhair navikāśibhiḥ
pūti gandhaugra gandhīnī amla gandhāni varjayet
kiṭa koṣa vipaddhāni śīrṇa paryuṣitāni ca
bhagna patrañca na grāhyam kṛmī duṣṭam na cāharet*

Lord Brahmā told Nārada Muni, “Any flowers whose petals have been broken, are rotten and sticking together, or are impure or are not yet blossomed should not be used to worship the Lord. Also, one should not use flowers whose fragrance has been created by an external source such as by spraying scent; or whose odor is foul, pungent, or sour; or that have worms or cocoons on them. All these flowers are considered contaminated and are thus rejected.” (Skanda Purāṇa)

It is confirmed in the Viṣṇu-rahaṣya that any flower that has fallen on the ground, even if it is a whitish fragrant-filled flower, should not be used to worship Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Any flower

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whose petals are not in good condition, or which has been forcibly opened, should not be used to worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead. According to Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī, "When favorable Vedic flowers are not available, then out of all the flowers the best ones can be chosen to use in the worship of the Supreme Lord. But if fragrant flowers are available, then non-fragrant flowers should not be used." (Digdarśinī-tikā 7.227)

*na paryuṣita doṣosti jalajautpala campakaiḥ
tulasy agastya vakūle vilve gaṅgā jale tathā*

"The lotus flower that is born in the water, Champaka (yellow fragrant flower), Tulasi, Agastya flowers, Bakula flowers, Bilva leaves, and Ganges water are not considered contaminated even if they are kept for a long period of time for using in the worship." (Jñāna-mālā)

FLOWERS WHICH SHOULD NOT BE OFFERED TO THE LORD

*haste yad vidhṛtam pranām asamaye yad vāma haste kṛtam
yaccāntar jaladhau tamārcaṇe vidhau puṣpāñca tad varjayet
bhariktvā yad viṭapādikam kṣitiruhāṁ ca utpātya yaccāhṛtam
yaccākramya samāhṛtam tad akhilam puṣpam bhavaty āsuram
cauryākṛṣṭam anukti duṣṭam aśuci sprṣṭam yad aprokṣitam
yac cāghrātām adho'mbare vinihitam kṛtam ca tad varjayet*

"If someone paid obeisance while holding flowers in the hands, those flowers cannot be used to worship the Deities. If flowers are picked with the left hand, or washed by dipping them deep in water, they are rejected for Deity worship. If one picks flowers from a tree after breaking the branch of that tree, uprooting the tree, or climbing on it, those flowers can only be

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used to worship the demons, but not the demigods or the Supreme Lord. One should also avoid using stolen flowers, flowers that have been touched by untouchables (for example, ladies who have just given birth or are passing through their menstrual period), that were not sprinkled with water, that were artificially scented, were obtained from a dirty place, or that were placed in a cloth that was worn on the lower part of the body." (Kurma Purāṇa)

OFFERING LEAVES TO THE LORD

*puṣpa abhāve hi deyāni patrāṇy api janārdane
patrābhāve payo deyam tena puṇyam avāpnuyāt*

"If there is a shortage of flowers or if they are not available for worshiping Lord Kṛṣṇa, the caretaker of all beings, then leaves can be used as a replacement. If even leaves are not available, then water should be offered as a replacement, because by doing so, one still obtains the merit of offering flowers." (Viṣṇu-dharmottara)

The leaves used to worship Lord Kṛṣṇa should be very soft and new. If such leaves are offered with devotion then one attains the merit of offering flowers.

TULASI MUST BE PRESENT IN ALL DEITY WORSHIP

*tulasīṁ vinā na kṛiyate tasya pūjā
snānam na yad tat tulasīṁ vinā kṛtam
bhuktam na tad yat tulasīṁ vinā kṛtam
pītam na tad yat tulasīṁ vinā kṛtam*

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"One should not worship the Supreme Lord without Tulasī because He will not accept any offering without it. Bathing the Supreme Lord without Tulasī is not considered bathing. Offering food to the Supreme Lord without Tulasī is not accepted by the Lord. Even water, if offered without Tulasī, is not accepted by the Lord." (Brhannāradīya Purāṇa)

Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa does not care for gorgeous offerings but is hungry for the devotee's love and devotion. He even accepts the chipped rice from His pure devotee, as He did from His friend Sudāmā of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. If a devotee serves Lord Kṛṣṇa with a genuine devotional attitude, the Lord accepts those offerings. Even if a devotee does not have any Tulasī leaves to offer food to the Lord with, He even accepts the offering touched by Tulasī wood and He eats it. If Tulasī wood also is not available, and food has to be offered, then just by thinking of Tulasī, or while chanting the names of Tulasī the food should be offered to the Lord. By doing so, the Lord will accept the offering. The Lord is very attached to Tulasī, which is why He happily accepts the offerings when they are offered with Tulasī even if the Tulasī leaves are dry or stale. Therefore, one should always offer food with Tulasī to the Supreme Lord.

*na tasya naraka kleśo yo arcayet tulasi dalaḥ
pāpiṣṭho vā 'py apāpiṣṭhaḥ satyam satyam na saṁśayaḥ*

"Whether one is sinful or pious, if one worships Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa with Tulasī leaves, it is for certain that that person will never fall into hell." (Agastya Saṁhitā)

Any person who sincerely worships the Supreme Lord with the leaves of the Tulasī plant will go to the spiritual world. Also, a person who worships and offers Tulasī leaves at the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa along with very soft *mañjarīs* (Tulasī's flowers) attains the Supreme Lord's abode and never returns to the material world. This means one obtains more merit by

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offering one Tulasī leaf to Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa than by offering many kinds of flowers and leaves to Him.

INAPPROPRIATE TIMES TO PICK TULASI AND HOLY GRASS

*bhānuvāram vinā dūrvām tulasīm dvādaśīm vinā
jīvitasya avināśāya na vicinvīta dharma vit*

“One who knows the scriptures properly and desires to live a healthy life should avoid picking kuśā grass (a kind of auspicious grass) on Sundays and Tulasī leaves on the Dvādaśī (a day after Ekādaśī day) for worshiping the Lord.” (Garuḍa Purāṇa)

Although there are statements in the Smṛuti Śāstras that one should not pick Tulasī leaves on Sundays, on the new moon days, on the full moon days, and on the Dvādaśī days, Gauḍīyā Vaiṣṇavas strictly refrain from picking Tulasī leaves only on Dvādaśī days throughout the year. If the Ekādaśī fast falls on Dvādaśī day, then the Tulasī leaves should be picked on the day before the fasting day (on the Ekādaśī day). There are several laws governing the picking of Tulasī leaves. The Vāyu Purāṇa states that any person who picks Tulasī leaves to worship Lord Harī while unclean or at dawn or dusk is certainly an offender. Whatever good results one would have attained all remain fruitless.

OFFERING THE LORD NICE VARIETIES OF FOOD

*nānā vidhānna pānaiś ca bhakṣanādyai manoharai
naivedyām kalpayed viṣṇos tad abhāve ca pāyasam
kevalam gṛhīta yuktam*

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“One should offer Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa many varieties of food prepared from grains, beans, vegetables, fruits, and milk products along with beverages prepared in the best way possible. If one is unable to acquire all of this for some reason, then one should just offer Him sweet rice mixed with ghee.”
(Vaidhāyana Smṛuti)

There are two ways Lord Kṛṣṇa accepts the offering of His sincere devotee. One is by personally eating them as He stated in the Bhagavad Gītā (9.25) and the other is by looking at the offering. As Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself stated to Lord Brahmā in the Brahma Purāṇa:

*naivedyam purato nyastam dṛṣṭaiva svikṛtam mayā
bhaktasya rasanāgreṇa rasam aśnāmi padmaja*

“O Lotus-born Brahmā, whatever amount of pure food is brought before Me as an offering to Me, I accept it by glancing over it and, when My devotee takes that offering away and eats it as My remnant, I sit on the tip of their tongue and relish its taste. This is one of the ways I eat the offering.”

The utensils used in offering food to the Lord should be very clean and, as per one’s capacity, should be made of gold, silver, copper, bell metal, clay, *palāśa* leaves, or lotus leaves because these elements are very dear to Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. It is stated in the Brahma-yamala that any food that includes or is mixed with wine, meat, the green or white varieties of eggplant, red lentils, mushrooms, or beets should not be offered to the Lord. Worship in an established temple should be very punctual and in accordance with the proper rules and regulations in order to avoid offenses. On the other hand, in one’s individual residence one can worship the Lord according to time, place, and circumstances, without breaking any rules of Vedic scriptures. Śrīla Vyāsadeva says in the Kriyā-yoga-sāra that one should worship the Lord while sitting on a seat made of either

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cotton, silk, wool, or kuśā grass. The food offered to the Lord should be sumptuous and cooked in ghee or edible oils. The *chapatis* (Indian flat bread) should be smeared with ghee or butter because without ghee or butter they are said to be inedible. If initiated, one should chant the eighteen syllable mantra (the sixth *Gāyatrī* mantra) while offering food to the Lord. If not yet initiated, then prayers to the scripturally authentic Spiritual Master are to be chanted while making the offering, for he will make the offering to the Lord for the uninitiated. This is the Vedic law of offering food to the Lord.

Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī wonderfully presents the sincere plea of a Vaiṣṇava who wants their prepared food to be accepted by the Lord. He says, "O Lord Kṛṣṇa, enemy of the Mura demon, as You happily accepted the eatables from the wives of the Brāhmaṇas of Mathurā; the banana peels from Vidura's wife; the butter, yogurt, and cow's milk from the cowherd girls of Vraja; the chipped rice from your friend Sudāmā; the milk from the nipples of mother Yaśodā; and the sweets offered with love by the Vraja Gopīs, in the same way please accept this food gift prepared by me with pleasure. In other words, as You previously accepted all the gifts of Your devotees, please accept my offering with the same happiness." Lord Kṛṣṇa confirms His acceptance of His devotees' offerings if they are made with true devotion. (See Bhagavad Gītā 9.22)

*yo mām eva arcanāṁ kṛtvā tatra prāpaṇam uttamāṁ
śeṣam annāṁ samāśnāti tataḥ saukhya taram nu kim*

"After worshiping Me, one should offer Me sumptuous food and then eat the remnants. What could be more pleasing than this in one's life?" (Varāha Purāṇa)

Every activity connected with Lord Kṛṣṇa is ecstatic. The beginning, middle, and end of every spiritual function is perfect and transcendental. There is a saying that every pleasure ends

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in misery, but in devotional life pleasure always ends with pleasure. Therefore, spiritual life is filled with variegated pleasures and no misery at any time.

All kinds of worship of the Lord must be performed within one's means. If one can purchase items of worship and give them to the devotees for worshipping the Lord in the temple, it is always appreciated. The Lord is concerned with one's devotion and not with the required item. He is not concerned with how much one gives, but is concerned with how much one keeps away from Him. It is better to be simple and serve the Lord in a simple way with honestly earned money because worshiping the Lord with improperly earned money reaps neither good nor bad result.

CATEGORIES OF WORSHIP

*āsana svāgate sārghye pādyam ācamanīyakam
madhuparkācamana snāna vāsanābharaṇāni ca
sugandha sumano dhūpa dīpa naivedya vandanam
prayojayed arcanājñam upacārānī tu ṣoḍaśa*

"There are sixteen sequential categories of worshipping the Lord: offering the Lord a seat, welcoming, *arghya*, *pādya*, *ācamana*, *madhuparka*, *ācamana* again, giving Him a bath, dressing Him, putting ornaments on Him, offering perfumes or anointing Him with sandalwood paste, offering flowers, incense, a ghee lamp, food, and then prayers." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 11.120, 121)

*arghyañ ca pādyācamana-madhuparkācamānyapi
gandhādayo nivedyanta upacārā daśāḥ kramāt
gandhādibhir nivedyantaiḥ pūjā pañca upacārikī*

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ṣaḍāryas trividhaḥ proktās tāsām ekam̄ samācaret

“Then there are ten categories of worship: to offer the Lord *arghya, pādya, ācamana, madhuparka, ācamana*, perfume or sandalwood paste, flowers, incense, a ghee lamp, and food. There are also five categories of worship: to offer the Lord incense, flowers, frankincense, a lamp, and food. The worshiper should choose from either sixteen, ten, or five categories of worship and follow one standard.” (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa)

*ato 'trālikhitam̄ yad yad upacārādikam̄ param̄
sarva tat tat ca jāniyāl lokarītyānusārataḥ*

“Whatever worshipping processes are not included herein, a devotee should worship with according to their Vaiṣṇava tradition and according to the popular system.” (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 11.142)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī explains in his *Digdarśinī-tīkā*, “There are many popular ways of worshiping the Lord; such as taking care of the Lord’s hair before bathing Him, putting on His bathing clothes, offering Him a seat for eating, offering Him a fragrant drink after He eats, and offering Him sesame seeds mixed with sugar candy for digesting the food. These activities are to be done on a daily basis. On His birthday, one should bathe Him with water mixed with sesame seeds. One should offer Him the first of the newly harvested food grains and should worship according to traditional social customs. For example, one should keep Him warm in the winter by supplying warm clothes, a heater, and hot, spicy foods. But in summer, the Lord should be offered cooling foods and drinks blended with yogurt, ice, cardamom, and sugar, along with some other cooling ingredients. After the Lord eats His meal, He is then offered a wonderful bed to rest. In the summer, one should give Him extra rest in the daytime; and in the winter, one should give Him

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less rest during the day but extra rest at night. This is because the days are longer in summer and the nights are longer in winter. One should strictly follow all the established rules of the Vedic scriptures, which are taught by an authentic Spiritual Master."

One should give up miserliness, and should generously worship the Lord according to the aforementioned process. If an article of worship is missing, then one should think of that article during the worship. In all circumstances, the Supreme Personality of Godhead should be kept satisfied.

PROPER TIMES TO INSTALL THE DEITY

*uttarasa asrite bhanau sukla-pakṣe suresvara
kṛṣṇa-pakṣa antima trayamsad rte suraganarcita*

"The Deity of the Supreme Lord, who is worshiped by all the demigods, should be established properly and His worship inaugurated on the days when the sun travels in the northern hemisphere. But inauguration should not be done when the sun is traveling in the southern hemisphere or on the dark fortnight's thirteenth and fourteenth days, on the new-moon day, or on the first day of either fortnights." (Hayaśīrṣa Pañcharātra)

For an auspicious purpose, only auspicious days should be chosen and an authentic Spiritual Master knows this secret. According to Vaiśnava tradition, there are certain days in a month when auspicious functions, such as temple construction, installation of the Deities, marriage ceremonies, thread ceremonies, and festivities for Lord Kṛṣṇa should be observed. Such times occur when the sun travels through the northern hemisphere. When the sun travels in the southern hemisphere, the demigods, along with Lord Viṣṇu, go to sleep. At that time,

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holding auspicious functions are forbidden. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas follow the instructions laid down by Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī in the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, where all rules of auspicious activities are vividly described. If one is able to rigidly follow all the proper standards mentioned in this book then they satisfy the Supreme Lord.

WHEN THE PERSONALITY OF THE DEITY LEAVES THE DEITY

*khaṇḍite śphuṭite dagdhe bhraṣṭe māna vivarjite
yāgahīne paśusprṣṭe patite duṣṭa bhūmiṣu
anya mantrārcite caiva patita sparṣa duṣīte
daśasu eteṣu no cakruḥ sannidhānar̄m divaukaśāḥ
iti sarvagato viṣṇuḥ paribhāṣāñcakāra ha*

"If the Deity is broken, cracked, or has caught fire; if He has been dropped, has been disrespected by being touched with the left hand, has not been properly worshiped, or festival ceremonies were not held for Him; if He was touched by an animal, has fallen into a dirty place, has been worshiped with another Deity's mantra, or has become impure because of being touched by an outcaste or a fallen person—in these different ways, the personality of the Deity does not live within the Deity. The Supreme Lord Viṣṇu has stated this Himself." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 19.1025, 1026)

*yad dravya yat pramāṇam vā ya mūriś ca uddhṛtā hareḥ
tad dravya tat pramāṇaḥ ca sa mūrtis tatra kīrt�ate*

"In replacing the Deity of Lord Śrī Harī, the new Deity of Lord Śrī Harī that is being established should be the exact same size and made of the same materials as the Deity being

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removed. In this rule there should be no compromise whatsoever." (Hayaśīrṣa Pañcharātra)

After removing the pedestal of the previous Deity, one should establish the new pedestal on that very day. After removing the old Deity, one should establish the new Deity within two to three days. If one takes longer than that to reestablish the Deity, then the installation becomes faulty. (See Hayaśīrṣa Pañcharātra for more information)

INSTALLATION OF THE DEITY

*om yajjāgrata ityādyair mantraiḥ sadbhīḥ kramāt sprśet
devasya dakṣīṇāṁ pārśvāṁ vāmāṁ pṛṣṭhāṁ śīrah padau*

"After placing the Deity in its place, a Vaiśnava should chant the text of the *om yaj-jāgrata* verse, and then, while chanting *mūla-mantras*, the person who is installing the Deity should touch the transcendental limbs of the Deity (the Supreme Lord), beginning with the right side of the abdomen, the left side of the abdomen, and then the back, head, and two lotus feet." (Bhaviṣya Purāṇa)

It is stated in the Matsya Purāṇa that while meditating on the Supreme Lord with one-pointed intelligence, a Vaiśnava who is installing the Deity should chant the following *mūla-mantras*:

ATHA MŪLA-MANTRĀNI

om yajjāgrato dūram udaiti daivāṁ
(Touch the right side of the Lord's abdomen)

om yena karmāṇyapaso maṇīṣine yajña
(Touch the left side of the Lord's abdomen.)

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oṁ yat prajñānāmrta ceto dhṛtiśca
(Touch the Lord's back.)

oṁ yenedaṁbhūtam bhuvanam bhaviṣyat
(Touch the Lord's head.)

oṁ yasminn ṛcaḥ sāmayajūṁśi yasmin
(Touch the Lord's right foot.)

oṁ sukhārathiraścātivayan manusyān
(Touch the Lord's left foot.)

After finishing the above mantras of the Bhavisya Purāṇa, the person appointed to install the Deity should pay his humble obeisance after lying flat before the Deity but outside the threshold of the Deity room.

*ekāhapūjā vihitau kuryād dviguṇam arcanam
trirātre tu mahāpūjāṁ samprokṣaṇam ataḥ param
māsādūardhvam anekāharāṁ pūjā yadi vihanyate
pratiṣṭhaivesyate kaiścīt kaiścīt samprokṣaṇa kramāḥ*

"If the Deity was not worshiped for one day, then double worship should be performed on the next day. If the worship was not done for three days, then a grand worship ceremony should be held. If the Deity was left without worship for even longer than that, then a grand bathing ceremony should be performed. The great sages have recommended that if the Deity has been left without being worshiped for more than one month, then the Deity of the Lord should be reinstalled. But sometimes it is recommended that a great bathing ceremony (such as a bathing ceremony with 108 pots filled with auspicious ingredients and water) should be performed for this." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 19.1038, 1039)

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“Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī states in his commentary that if the Deity was touched by a low-class untouchable person, if the Deity remained unworshiped for a long time, if He was touched by an animal, or if He was being worshiped with another Deity’s mantra, then rather than reinstalling the Deity, one should perform a grand bathing ceremony.” (Digdarśinī-tīkā)

The Supreme Lord Śrī Viṣṇu is the fountainhead of all the demigods: *mūlam hi viṣṇur devānām* (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 10.4.39.) This means worshipping Lord Kṛṣṇa includes all worship, including all the demigods. The Lord does not need anyone’s worship but everyone needs to worship Him to obtain their desired goal, bliss. *Yasmin tuṣṭe sarvam eva tuṣṭam bhavati*. Nārada Muni told the Prachetās that people who leave the worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa aside to worship the demigods are called less intelligent. Sometimes many people give up the worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa and worship the demigods. Their situation is like those who give up gold and accept mud. Such people should know that all of the demigods are automatically worshiped when the Supreme Lord is worshiped, because Lord Śrī Harī includes all of the demigods. *viṣṇor ārādhanaṁ param*. Whoever has worshiped Lord Śrī Harī has automatically satisfied all living entities, both movable and immovable. Any person who worships Lord Śrī Harī becomes free from all kinds of sins and achieves the topmost destination, the spiritual world. It is certain that people who are initiated with Kṛṣṇa mantras and who worship Him with devotion will surely become liberated. What more can be said? People who disagree with Vedic knowledge and envy the cows and Brāhmaṇas are considered to be demoniac.

EVERYONE CAN BENEFIT FROM THE WORSHIP OF THE DEITY

pūjitaṁ pūjyamānaṁ vā yaḥ paśyed bhaktito harim

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śraddhayā modayed yas tu so’pi yoga phalaṁ labhet

“If one is unable to or is unqualified to worship the Lord but sees Him with faith and becomes happy by seeing Him being worshiped, or about to be worshiped, that person achieves the same result of one who worships Him.”

The worship of the Lord should be done without any material desires. As Lord Nārāyaṇa says to Nārada Muni in the Padma Purāṇa, “O sage, any person who worships My Deity form with a devotional attitude, systematically as per Vedic rules, and with faith, remains unobstructed, even in dreams. In all circumstances, a devotee remains fearless.” According to Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī, “One should not worship semi-demigods, demons, and hobgoblins, who need meat and wine to be offered to them, because such worship is considered to be as bad as drinking wine.” (Jīva Goswāmī tīkā)

THE POTENCY OF TAKING CHARANĀMRTA

*prāyaś cittam yadi prāptam kṛcchram vā tu aghamarṣanam
so’pi pādodakam pītvā Śuddhiṁ prāpnoti tat kṣanāt*

Lord Brahmā said to Nārada, “Even if someone has performed abominable activities in life, and requires great atonements along with chanting of powerful hymns, they immediately become purified by drinking a little amount of water that has washed the lotus feet of the Lord.” (Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa)

Any person who drinks *charanāmṛta* becomes immune to becoming infected by chronic diseases, obstacles, and fear of ferocious entities. No evil planet can affect that person. If one drinks the water that has washed the Śālagrāma Śilā and

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touches that hand to their head, Lord Brahmā, Lord Viṣṇu, and Lord Śiva become greatly pleased with that person. Before taking *charaṇāṁṛta*, the Vaiṣṇavas usually chant this mantra:

*akālamṛtyu haraṇam̄ sarva pāpa vināśanam̄
viṣṇu pādodakam̄ pītvā, punar janma na vidyate*

“The person who drinks the water that has washed the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu becomes free from untimely death and sins, and after death does not take another birth again in this material world.” (Viṣṇu Purāṇa)

If anyone quits their body just after drinking *charaṇāṁṛta*, the messengers of Yamarāja stay away from that person because that person belongs to the abode of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The water that has washed the feet of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is equal to holy water of places of pilgrimage. After drinking such water, one does not need to take any *āchamana* or wash their hands or mouth. If a person relinquishes the *charaṇāṁṛta* but instead visits holy places of pilgrimage for purification, that person is like a person who gives up unlimitedly valuable jewels in exchange for a piece of glass.

“The Supreme Personality of Godhead is all pure. His two lotus feet are all pure, and the water that emanated from them is all pure. Therefore, after drinking that water, one does not need to take any *āchamana*, because *charaṇāṁṛta* cannot be contaminated. According to the scriptures, after bathing, eating, drinking milk, taking breakfast, and after chewing anything to swallow, one must wash one's hands and mouth for purification. However, one does not need to purify himself after drinking the *charaṇāṁṛta* or water obtained from washing the Lord's lotus feet.” (Digdarśinī-tīkā)

*akāla mṛtyu śamanam̄ sarva vyādhī vināśanam̄
sarva duḥkha upaśamanam̄ hari pāda udakam̄ śubham*

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"The auspicious water obtained from washing the lotus feet of Lord Hārī removes untimely death and destroys all kinds of diseases and miseries." (Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa)

As by taking the correct medicines one's diseases are destroyed, similarly, by taking the water that has washed the two lotus feet of the Lord, all of one's sins are destroyed. By taking *charanāmṛta*, a devotee also achieves a form like that of the Lord and enjoys with Him in the spiritual world.

ONE SHOULD BE SPIRITUALLY INITIATED TO WORSHIP

Without spiritual initiation from a pure Spiritual Master who is confirmed by the ancient Vedic scriptures, one is not allowed to worship the installed Deity of the Supreme Lord at the altar. For a person who is not properly initiated by a real Guru, all of their spiritual activities remain fruitless. Therefore it is essential to find a perfect Spiritual Master who is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures and take spiritual initiation from Him to worship the Lord. One actually needs to worship the Lord to receive divine blessings from the Lord to become free from sins. Unless one has worshiped the Lord, their human life is considered to be a waste. Based on this statement, one can understand that it is essential to accept spiritual initiation. The Digarśinī-tīkā states, "If anyone chants a Gāyatrī mantra without being initiated, that person is cursed by the presiding deity of that mantra." Hearing the Gāyatrī mantra from a bona-fide Spiritual Master increases its spiritual effect one hundred times.

THE BENEFITS OF WORSHIPPING ŚĀLAGRĀMA ŚILĀ

dṛṣṭvā prañamitā yena śnāpitā pūjitā tathā

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yajñā koṭi samarāṇ puṇyāṇ gavāṁ koṭi phalaṁ bhavet

Lord Śiva said to his son Skanda, "Any person who has seen Śālagrāma Śilā, paid obeisance to Him, bathed Him, or worshiped Him, achieves the results of performing ten million sacrifices and giving ten million cows in charity." (Skanda Purāṇa)

As per the Vedic scriptures, only a traditional twice-born Brāhmaṇa is allowed to worship Śālagrāma Śilā. He must be expert in pronouncing the mantras, otherwise one can just pay obeisance to Him and have *darśana* (see the Deity or Śālagrāma Śilā) to attain equal merit to worshipping Him. Any person who worships Lord Śrī Śālagrāma and bathes Him with a conchshell achieves the results of donating one hundred *kāmadhenus* (desire-fulfilling cows). Even if somebody just blows a conchshell during the bathing ceremony of Lord Kṛṣṇa, that person goes to the abode of Lord Brahmā. Just see, what a wonderful blessings spiritual life awards!

THE RESULT OF PUTTING ON TILAKA WITH DIFFERENT FINGERS

*anāmikā kāmadoktā madhyamā"yuṣkarī bhavet
ariguṣṭhāḥ puṣṭidāḥ proktās tarjanī mokṣa sādhani*

"One who uses the ring finger to apply *tilaka* (putting a holy mark on the forehead) achieves the desired goal of life. One who uses the middle finger increases the duration of life. One who uses one's thumb to apply *tilaka* achieves nice nourishment, and one who uses the little finger achieves liberation." (Padma Purāṇa)

In the Skanda Purāṇa, Nārada Muni told Garuḍa that if

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gopī-chandana is used to put a *tilaka* mark on the forehead, by the mercy of the Supreme Lord, no evil planets, *yakṣas* (semi-demigods), *piśāchas*, (ghosts and devils), snakes, or demons can harm that person. One should never use the index finger to apply *tilaka*. "The Supreme Lord established a benediction in *tilaka*, which is why even a person who is not religious but wears *tilaka* on the forehead turns towards earning merits." (Digdarśinī-tīkā 4.233) Any household that has *gopīchandana*, a Tulasī plant, a conchshell, or Śālagrāma Śilā worship has no fear from Yamarāja, for these possessions are owned by a Kṛṣṇa conscious person or make one become Kṛṣṇa conscious in due course.

THE BENEFIT OF CLAPPING HANDS IN FRONT OF THE DEITY

*nṛtyatāṁ śrīpater agre tālikā vādanair bhr̥ṣam
uddiyante śarīrasthāḥ sarveḥ pātaka pakṣīṇaḥ*

Nārada Muni said, "If any person sings, dances, and claps hands in front of the Deity of the Supreme Lord, who is the husband of the Goddess of Fortune, their sins run away from their body just as a bunch of birds fly away by hearing the loud clapping of hands." (Viṣṇu-dharmottara)

ACCEPTABLE WAYS OF PAYING OBEISANCES TO THE LORD

*dorbhyāṁ padbhyāñca jānubhyāṁ urasā śirasā dṛṣṭā
mānasā vācasā ceti pranāmośtāriṇa īrtih
jānubhyāñcaiva bāhubhyāṁ śirasā vācasā dhiyā
pañcārigakah pranāmaḥ syāt pūjāsu pravarāvimau*

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"While paying prostrated obeisance, anyone who uses both hands, both feet, both thighs, the chest, the head, the sight, mind, and words is called *sāṣṭāṅga dāṇḍavat* (paying obeisance while using eight limbs). When one pays bowed obeisance using both knees, both hands, the head, words, and thoughts. This is called *pañchāṅga-dāṇḍavat* (paying obeisance using five limbs). Both categories of obeisance are accepted in the worship of the Supreme Lord." (Āgama Śāstra)

Even if the most sinful person pays obeisance to Lord Harī, the messengers of Yamarāja cannot look at him, just as an owl is unable to look at the sun. Also, if due to circumstances, one is unable to pay obeisances and just thinks of paying obeisance to the Lord, even that person becomes a candidate to obtain mercy from the Lord. But if someone pays obeisance to the Lord using just one hand, that person loses all the acquired merits of previously performing religious rituals.

ACHIEVING REALIZATIONS IN KNOWLEDGE

*satyāpi bhedāpagame nātha tavāham na mamā-kinas
tvām samudro hi tarāṅgaḥ kvacina samudro na tarāṅgaḥ.*

"O Lord, it is true that when someone is situated in knowledge and achieves self-realization, that person understands that You are the eternal Lord and that he is Your servant, just as the waves of the ocean, although composed of water, cannot be called the ocean." (Śrīpāda Śaṅkarāchārya)

The statements of Śaṅkarāchārya stated here are actually true because the wave in the ocean is a part of the ocean, but a wave cannot be called the ocean, because the part can never be called the whole. In this way, by using the example used by the monists, dualism can be established. Although the wave is

composed of water, it cannot be called the whole body of water. It can only be called a part of the whole water.

POTENCY OF DEVOTIONAL SERVICE

*aśubhāni ca karmāni sumahā pātakāni ca
bhaktih kṣaṇena dahati tūla rāśim ivānalah*

"All the results of inauspicious activities and the most grievous sins are at once destroyed by the potency of devotional service, just as fire immediately burns a mountain of cotton." (Kulārnava-rahaśya 12)

Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī wonderfully explains about the importance of executing devotional service to Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The Lord becomes pleased with anyone who loves doing devotional service; He is not pleased merely by a person's material good qualities and service. In the Mahābhārat, there is a history of a hunter named Dharma. He was daily killing innocent animals. He would worship his parents, thinking they were gods, and he was selling meat to support them. One day he saw the worship of Śālagrāma Śilā, in a Brāhmaṇa's house. He liked it very much and later he was initiated into spiritual life. Slowly he developed real devotion to his Guru and the Lord. One day his Guru became sick and by the order of his elderly, sick Guru, the hunter worshipped his Guru's Śālagrāma Śilā. Seeing his devotion, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa rewarded him liberation. If a hunter can develop love and devotion in his heart then anyone can develop it and obtain liberation from this world and live with God in His spiritual world.

People sometimes think certain qualities—such as being aged, having wisdom, and having beauty—are required before one can perform devotional service. But if being aged is

required to do devotional service, then what about Dhruva Mahārāja? He was only five years old and not even a grown up man. If wisdom is required, then how could an elephant (Gajendra of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam) receive liberation? He was just an ignorant animal, and not even a human being, yet he received liberation. If beauty was required to please the Lord, then what about the hunchbacked Kubjā? She was not beautiful at all. If the Lord can be pleased only by possessing riches, then how could the poor Sudāmā of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam please Him? He was the poorest of all poor. If the Lord can be pleased only by those born in high-class families, then Vidura Mahārāja could not have pleased the Lord because he was a Śūdra. If the Lord can be pleased only by great abilities, then Mahārāja Ugrasena, who was imprisoned by Kaṁsa, could not have pleased Him. Lord Kṛṣṇa saw the internal consciousness of Ugrasena, and after killing King Kaṁsa Lord Kṛṣṇa put him on the king's throne, and He Himself became his minister. Therefore, the Lord is addressed as the pleaser of His unalloyed devotees. This is the proof that the Lord is pleased only by devotional service, not just by good material qualifications. Therefore, He is said to be the lover of His real devotees and anyone can become one.

The symptoms of *bhakti* (devotional service) are described in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (11.14.26), where the Lord Himself says that by engaging in *bhakti*, one's mind becomes immediately purified. The examples of persons who attained perfection by the practice of *bhakti* are given in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (10.72.21): King Hariśchandra, King Rantideva, King Bali, King Śibi, and even a hunter attained the unattainable abode of the Supreme Lord by performing devotional service. Therefore Uddhava told the Gopīs of Vrindāban that all charity, vows of fasting, all austerities, all sacrifices, chanting of *japa*, studying of Vedic scriptures, sense control, and all auspicious activities culminate in serving Lord Kṛṣṇa through devotional service.

Devotional service according to Gauḍīya Vaisnavism means that the devotee becomes the caretaker of God, Lord Kṛṣṇa, and does not desire to be taken care of by Him. The Lord reciprocates according to the devotee's devotion and that is His nature. Mother Yaśodā is the perfect example of this, who took care of God, Kṛṣṇa, who is the caretaker of all living entities in the millions of universes as stated in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, *eko bahūnāṁ yo vidadhāti kāmān*. In the previous ages one had to work hard to receive enlightenment and liberation, but presently, in Kaliyuga, one can easily achieve this destination simply by chanting His holy name and performing some devotional service. Those whose minds are purified always engage in loving devotional service and thus never experience hellish conditions of life, even in dreams.

*kim vedaiḥ kimu śāstrair vā kim vā tīrtha niṣevaraṇaiḥ
viṣṇu-bhakti vihīnānāṁ kim tapobhīḥ kimadhvaraiḥ*

"What is the use of having knowledge of the Vedas, study of the scriptures, going to the holy places of pilgrimage, performing austerities, and performance of sacrifices if one does not execute devotional service to please the Supreme Personality of Godhead?" (Nārada Purāṇa and Padma Purāṇa)

Those who are Vaiṣṇavas faithfully devote themselves to the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. They never desire anything other than devotional service as stated in the Śiksāstam, *mama janmani janmanīśvare bhavatād bhaktir ahaitukī tvayī*. Therefore, such devotees' minds are completely purified, and they are known as unalloyed devotees.

Just as fire burns even if one touches it accidentally, similarly, no matter how one worships or meditates on Lord Harī, that person still attains purification. But if anyone's mind is still attached to sense gratification, that person cannot feel ecstasy in devotional service, just as a person cannot reach something in

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the East by running towards the West. If a person is engaged in devotional service wholeheartedly to please the Lord it means that person has performed all kinds of religious functions in his previous life and has burnt all of his sins to reach the present stage. When a person no longer desires to sin, and acts and thinks only meritoriously, it should be understood that the Supreme Lord has manifested Himself in their heart. When a person gives up all other duties and engages in devotional service to Kṛṣṇa, that person develops these qualities automatically.

*kulācāra vihīno'pi dṛḍha-bhakti jitendriyah
praśastah sarva lokānāṁ na tu aṣṭādaśa vidya kāḥ
bhakti hīno dvijāḥ sāntaḥ sad jāti dhārmikaś tathā*

Nārada Muni said, "Even if someone is born into a low-class family but is totally dedicated and fixed in devotional service so as to please the Supreme Lord and has all his senses under control, that person is better than a person who has no devotion to the Supreme Lord, but is learned in the eighteen categories of Vedic knowledge, is a twice-born traditional Brāhmaṇa, is peaceful, and is pious." (Skanda Purāṇa)

It does not matter whether one is born in a Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, Śūdra, or even an outcaste family, if one chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra and has real devotion to the Supreme Lord Śri Kṛṣṇa, that person is considered to be the best among the whole human society. The Nārada Purāṇa states that any person who has no devotion for Lord Śri Kṛṣṇa, even though born in a Brāhmaṇa family, that person is considered lower than an ex-dog-eater outcaste who is devoted to the Lord wholeheartedly. When one is following spiritual life correctly and is actually advanced in spiritual knowledge of Lord Kṛṣṇa, that person should not be considered to be a lowborn or a Śūdra, even though born in such a low-class family.

DEVOTIONAL SERVICE REQUIRES LOVE

*patreṣu puṣpeṣu phaleṣu toyeṣu akṛita labhyeṣu
sadaiva satṣu bhaktyā sulabhye puruse purāṇe
muktau kim arthaṁ kriyate prayatnah?*

"The Supreme Lord is attained only through devotion. For those who are interested in devotion to the Lord, fruits, flowers, leaves, or water are easily available to please the Supreme Lord to attain liberation. If liberation can be obtained so easily, then why should one work hard, like in practicing yoga meditation, to attain liberation?" (Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa)

Devotional service to the Supreme Lord is naturally satisfying nectar that deeply increases to liberate the devotee. Therefore, anyone who does not execute devotional service to the Supreme Lord, but instead worships someone else is considered to be less intelligent.

THE GREATNESS OF DEVOTIONAL SERVICE

*brahmānando bhaved eṣa cet parārdhā guṇikṛtāḥ
naiti bhakti sukhāmbodheḥ paramāṇu tulāṁ apī*

"The ultimate trance of Brahman realization multiplied ten million times cannot become equal to even a drop of happiness derived from the ocean of pure devotional service." (Bhaktirasāmr̄ta-sindhu 1.1.38)

A Brahman-realized person is said to be expert in the knowledge of Vedic literature. But according to Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī, his life is a waste: *pārārigato 'pi vedānām*. "Even if one is expertly learned in all the Vedic literatures, if he is bereft

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of devotional service to Lord Śrī Harī, all of his studies are useless hard labor." (Bhakti-sandarbha 301) Therefore, one should not waste even one moment without execution of devotional service. A moment wasted without devotion to Kṛṣṇa is the greatest loss. One should therefore always think of doing devotional service for the Supreme Lord during one's whole life.

Those who take a vow to render devotional service to the Supreme Lord do not experience inauspiciousness, either in this world or in the next. As the blazing fire can turn a supply of wood into ashes, similarly devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead immediately destroys one's acquired sins. On the auspicious arrival of pure devotional service within one's heart, transcendental and realized knowledge follows automatically. Just as a forest fire automatically burns a snake, similarly, pure devotional service automatically burns ignorance. If this is so, then what is the use of studying the Vedas, going to holy places of pilgrimage, and performing austerity and sacrifices, if one remains bereft of devotional service to the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa?

AUTHORITATIVENESS OF DEVOTIONAL SERVICE

*śruti-smṛti-purāṇādi-pañcarātra-vidhim vinā
aikāntikī harer bhaktir utpātāyaiva kalpate*

"Any spiritual process (which sometimes may be called devotional service) performed to please the Supreme Lord that ignores the rules of the authorized Vedic scriptures such as the Upaniṣads, Purāṇas, Nārada Pañcharātra, and others, is simply an unnecessary disturbance in human society." (Bhaktirasāmṛta-sindhu and Brahma-yamala)

- It is found in the Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva that the

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Supreme Personality of Godhead is the speaker of rules of the Pañcharātra and a person can realize them only when one is fixed in Vedic knowledge of sādhana-bhakti (devotional service). The ultimate goal of human life is to realize God, the Personality of Godhead, but persons dominated by ignorance cannot understand that. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa lives in the truthful and bona-fide scriptures in the form of instructions. But for those scriptures that are questionable, argumentative, and motivated, God does not live in them and the ultimate instructions for going back home, back to Godhead, are not found in them. Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī explains that because the direct speaker of Pañcharātra is the Supreme Lord Himself, and that is why by the study of Pañcarātra for even the shortest duration, one can understand the goal of human life and the intricate meaning of the Vedas. (Paramātma Sandarbha 18)

THE ŚRĪMAD BHĀGAVATAM PRESCRIBES DEVOTIONAL SERVICE

*ādi madhya antye bhāgavate ei kaya
viṣṇu bhakti nitya siddha akṣaya avyaya*

"In the beginning, middle, and the end of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam it is emphatically stated that devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa is the eternally perfect, imperishable, and unchangeable function." (Chaitanya Bhāgavata, Antya 3.498)

All the learned personalities have described that, among all kinds of spiritual processes, devotional service to the Supreme Lord is the topmost. Even if devotional service is done unconsciously or even with madness, still it rewards one with positive results. What to speak of human beings, even the animals can execute devotional service and become blessed by the Lord. In the Rāmāyaṇa, a chipmunk helped Lord Rāma build

the bridge to Sri Lanka. When the little chipmunk saw that the big monkeys were building the bridge, but while building it, it had some small holes in it, she thought that she must do something to help close those holes. She jumped into the ocean water and then loitered in the sand which stuck to her wet body. She then went to those small holes and shook the sand into the holes to fill and patch them. Seeing the chipmunk working so hard in this way, Lord Rāma gave her His mercy by putting her on His lap and petting her. Even today, the three line marks from the Lord's hand can be seen on the backs of the descendants of that chipmunk. This is the result of sincerely executing devotional service according to one's capacity and the best of one's ability. Also, in every page of the Bhāgavatam, the process of liberation is mentioned. Provided one follows the process, the eternal Personality of Godhead will free one from the shackles of the material world and award one with residence in the spiritual world.

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura sang, *gaurāṅgera duṭi pada, yāra dhana-sampada, se jāne bhakati-rasa-sāra*: "Anyone who has accepted the two lotus feet of Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahāprabhu to be everything in life can truly understand the essence of devotional service." Devotional service is not very difficult. Anyone can understand it provided they have sincerely resolved to be devotees totally sold out to God. But it cannot be understood by the frivolous, insincere, fake, or hypocrites, who pose to be devotees. One has to be fortunate enough to follow in the footsteps of Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu so as to easily understand what devotional service is.

*WITHOUT DEVOTIONAL SERVICE,
EVERYTHING ELSE IS USELESS*

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aprāṇasyeva dehasya maṇḍanam loka rañjanam

"For a person who is bereft of devotional service, their high birth, their knowledge of revealed scriptures, their chanting of *japa*, and their performance of austerities, are all like decorations on a dead body, which are just meant to please the minds of people in general." (Hari-bhakti-śuddhodaya 3.11.12)

EATING BEFORE WORSHIPING THE SUPREME LORD

*eka kālam dvikālam vā trikālam pūjayed harim
apūjya bhojanam kurvan narakāni vrajennarah*

"Every initiated person should worship Lord Śrī Harī once, twice, or thrice each day. If a person eats right before worshiping the Lord, that person is considered fallen." (Viṣṇu-dharmottara)

FOLLOWING SPIRITUAL VOWS

*vrata upavāsa niyamair janma koṭy apy anuṣṭhitaiḥ
yajñaiś ca vividhaiḥ samyag bhaktir bhavati mādhave*

"Whoever has performed sufficient fasting, taken spiritual vows, followed rules and regulations for millions of births, and performed many sacrifices achieves the proper attitude of devotional service to Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is also called Mādhava." (Agastya Saṁhitā)

Whoever has acquired merits for many millions of births achieves devotional service unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead. But just as having sex with a prostitute leads to

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useless bodily labor, difficulties, and sins, so, without devotional service to the Lord, all spiritual functions result only in the difficulty and labor experienced from such activities. Unmotivated service rendered sincerely and favorably to the Supreme Personality of Godhead is called devotional service and that results in liberation. It is very easy for one who has become a soul truly surrendered to God. If this is so, then what foolish person will give up service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead and desire to merge into Him? Just as water gives life to all living entities, similarly devotional service gives life to all spiritual activities. Therefore, only the topmost fortunate soul wholeheartedly embraces the path of devotional service. As it is stated in the *Padyāvali*, *janma koṭi śukṛtibhīr na labhyate*, "It is difficult to obtain devotional service even by those who have performed meritorious deeds for millions of previous births." Such is the importance of devotional service and those who have wholeheartedly adopted it they are considered to be the luckiest in this world.

Thus ends the Seventh Chapter of the Vrajavāsī Realization.

VARNĀŚRAMA



श्वपचे ब्रह्म-लक्षणं द्विजे तच्च न विद्यते ।
न वे शूद्र भवेत्कुद्र द्विज भूधरनान च ॥१॥

*śvapace brahma lakṣaṇaṁ dvije tac ca na dṛśyate
nave śūdra bhavet kṣudra dvija bhūdharanā na ca*

If symptoms and qualities of a Brāhmaṇa are found in a Śūdra, and if a real Brāhmaṇa is bereft of Brāhmaṇa qualities, then that Brāhmaṇa cannot be called a Brāhmaṇa and that Śūdra cannot be called a Śūdra.

According to the Vedas, one's social position in the *varṇāśrama* system (the social and spiritual Vedic orders in human society) is determined both by one's birth and activities. The Sārvabhauma Dharma states, *janmanā jāyate sūdra, karmaṇā jāyate dvijāḥ*, "At birth even a Brāhmaṇa's child is considered like a Śūdra's child because Śūdra and Brāhmaṇa children take birth in similar ways. Only by the sacred thread ceremony does a Brāhmaṇa's son become an authentic Brāhmaṇa eligible to learn the Vedas and to become wise." Only after becoming learned in the scriptures is the Brāhmaṇa boy accepted as the spiritual guide for all social orders: *varṇānāṁ brāhmaṇo guruḥ* (Vṛndābana śatakam). Therefore, Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu glorified the wonderful pure qualities of a true Brāhmaṇa.

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There are some examples in Vedic civilization of persons born in non-Brāhmaṇa families who later became qualified to be Brāhmaṇas. There are some historical examples of Brāhmaṇas who were born in Kṣatriya families and later became Brāhmaṇa, and some were accepted as Kṣatriyas who were born into Brāhmaṇa families. But on the spiritual platform, a Vaiṣṇava is recognized by their spiritual qualities without consideration of their position at birth. Furthermore the Vyākaraṇa Śāstra states, *ajñānena śocati yaḥ saḥ śūdra*, "One who laments due to ignorance is called a Śūdra." Sometimes ignorant lamentation is found in other castes. But by sincere acceptance of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, even a Śūdra becomes better than a normal Brāhmaṇa who is not a devotee. Therefore, a person who is born in a low-class family should not lament for their inferior position but should seriously take up the path of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and become superior to even a non-devotee Brāhmaṇa. But to function as the Spiritual Master of anyone one has to be a traditional Brāhmaṇa and a pure Vaiṣṇava. Then only can one award spiritual initiation to others. An ordinary Vaiṣṇava who is not from a traditional Brāhmaṇa family is not authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures to function as a Spiritual Master in Vedic civilization for anyone. The functioning Spiritual Master has to have his own guarantee of liberation to be able to help others achieve liberation. If the Spiritual Master himself is unable to swim across the ocean of material existence, how can he carry anyone across the ocean of birth and death? The Spiritual Master must be scripturally authorized to receive direct blessings of the Supreme Lord and extend his blessings to others.

OCCUPATIONAL DUTIES IN VARNĀŚRAMA

na viseso 'sti varṇānāṁ sarva brahmam idam jagat

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brahmaṇā pūrva sṛṣṭāṁ hi karmabhir vanatāṁ gatam

Bhṛgu Muni said, "In the beginning, when Lord Brahmā created this universe, there was no need for social orders like the Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, or Śūdras, because at that time, the only occupational duty for everyone was to please the Supreme Lord. Later, everyone was categorized according to their inclination of work." (Mahābhārat Śalya-parva)

*brāhmaṇāḥ kṣatriya vaiśyāḥ sūdraḥ pāpa parāyaṇāḥ
nija ācāra vihīnaś ca bhaviṣyanti kalau yuge*

"In Kaliyuga, practically all Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras will be inclined to relinquish their own occupational duties and ethics and will lean more towards engaging in sinful activities." (Padma Purāṇa, Kriyā-yoga-sāra)

*brahmacārī gṛhasthaś ca vānaprasthaś ca bhikṣukāḥ
daṇḍasyaiva bhayad ete manusya vartmani sthitāḥ
na-bhīto yajate rājan na-bhīto dātum icchatī
na-bhītāḥ puruṣāḥ kaścit samaye sthatum icchatī*

Bhīṣmadeva said to Yudhiṣṭhīra, "Whether they are Brahmachārīs, Gṛhasthis, Vānaprasthīs, or Sanyāsīs, everyone performs their duties properly and remains fixed on their prescribed paths due to fear of getting punished. If there was no fear of getting punished no one would perform fire sacrifices, no one would want to give charity to the authentic receivers, and if there was no fear of getting punished then no one would remain steady in their prescribed position or follow their vows." (Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva 15. 12,13)

In Kaliyuga most of the Brāhmaṇas will not be inclined to study the Vedas, perform fire sacrifices, or engage in spiritual activities. They will only be interested in making money even if it

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is in the name of religion. In Kaliyuga, most Brāhmaṇas will even criticize the Vedas. They will engage in gambling, stealing, lying, and sometimes, just to make a living, Brāhmaṇas will hypocritically wear orange robes or have long matted hair. In this way almost all Brāhmaṇas will engage in inauthentic activities. In Kaliyuga not just the Brāhmaṇas, but also the Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras will not follow any principles and will go astray from their prescribed duties. To reform them, one has to follow the rules prescribed by Bhīṣmadeva for spiritual correction:

*vaca-dāṇḍo brāhmaṇānāṁ kṣatriyānāṁ bhujārpaṇam
dāna-dāṇḍah smṛta vaiśya nirdāṇḍah śūdra ucyate*

"If a Brāhmaṇa makes a spiritual mistake, the punishment for correcting him is using hard words, if a Kṣatriya makes a mistake and has to be corrected then his punishment is to only give him one meal of food for that day. If a Vaiśya makes a mistake and needs to be corrected, then he should be monetarily fined, and a Śūdra is to be consoled but never to be punished for his mistake. They simply carry on with their services regularly." (Mahābhārat, Sānti-parva 15.9)

There are still some real and truly authentic Brāhmaṇas in this Kaliyuga who actually follow Vedic standards properly and are true devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa, but they are difficult to find in Kaliyuga. One has to endeavor to find the real Brāhmaṇas and other castes who actually follow Vedic rules as per their *varṇa*.

*dvau bhūta sargo loke 'smin deva asura eva ca
viṣṇu bhaktah śṛtodeva āsurastad viparyayaḥ*

"In this world, there are two classes of created beings. Those who are devoted to Lord Kṛṣṇa are called divine, and those who are against Lord Kṛṣṇa are called demonic by the Vedic scriptures." (Padma Purāṇa)

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The perfect qualities of the social orders are described in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. There is no necessity to speculate or create any further qualities. The qualities and functions of the different orders are also described by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad Gītā. But the person who follows the *varṇāśrama* orders properly, but without rendering any devotional service to the Supreme Lord, does not fulfill their goal of existence as a human being.

*varṇāśramacārvatā puruṣena paraḥ pumān
viṣṇur ārādhya te panthā nānyat tat-toṣa-kāraṇam*

“The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Viṣṇu, is worshiped by one’s proper execution of prescribed duties under the system of *varṇa* and *āśrama*. Besides following this rule, there is no other way to fully satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Therefore, one must be situated in the institution of the four *varṇas* and *āśramas*.” (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3.8.9)

VAIŚNAVISM

*vaidiko miśrako vā'pi viprādīnāṁ vidhīyate
tāntriko viṣṇu bhaktasya sūdrasyāpi prakīrtitāḥ*

“There are three kinds of mantras: Vedic, mixed, and Tāntric (magical). The first two are meant for the Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, and Vaiśyas, but the third is meant for the Śūdra class, who also worship Lord Visnu.” (Padma Purāṇa, Pātāla-khaṇḍa 95.71)

There are three categories of devotees: the *uttama-adhikārī*, *madhyama-adhikārī* and *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī*—the stages of first, second, and third-class devotees are found only in the

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Vedic scriptures. The mixed worshipers are those who worship Lord Kṛṣṇa and also worship the demigods. The Śūdra class lean towards worshipping ghosts, hobgoblins, devils, and evil spirits but do not negate worshiping Lord Kṛṣṇa. But to attain the spiritual world, one must ultimately accept only Vaiśnavism (the path of devotional service) as one's way of life, and this is meant for everyone, regardless of their *varṇas* or *āśramas*.

Manu Mahārāja states in the Manu Smṛuti that the sacred thread ceremony for a Brāhmaṇa boy should be held during the eighth year, calculating from the time of conception. A sacred thread ceremony for a Kṣatriya boy should be performed during his eleventh year. A Vaiśya boy's sacred thread ceremony should be performed at the age of fifteen. It is stated in the Āgama Śṛuti that just as a Brāhmaṇa who has not yet undergone the sacred thread ceremony is unqualified to study the Vedas, similarly an uninitiated person is unable to worship the Supreme Lord in the temple because he does not know the proper mantras. Therefore, one must certainly accept mantra initiation first from a Spiritual Master who is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures written by Śrīla Vyāsadeva.

*patram puṣpam phalam toyam anna-pānādy auṣadham
anivedya na bhuñjīta yad āhārāya kalpitam
anivedya tu bhuñjānah prāyaścitti bhavennarah
tasmāt sarvam nivedyaiva viṣṇor bhuñjīta sarvadā*

"Whether it may be leaves, flowers, fruits, water, grains, drinks, or medicines, whatever it may be, if it has to be consumed by a twice-born then it has to be first offered to the Supreme Lord. If a twice-born person consumes anything without first offering it to the Lord, that person must perform atonements for purification. Therefore, everything should be first offered to the Lord before deciding to consume it." (Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa)

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Everything, including medicines and clothes, should be first offered to the Lord, at least by chanting the holy name of Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare, and then used. If one does so Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa becomes pleased with that person. If a Gṛhastha (householder) who cultivates agriculture offers the Lord his newly grown grains coming from his field, or fruits, flowers, or whatever else he obtains, the Lord becomes very satisfied with him.

*catuspadi hi niḥśreṇi brahmaṇy eva pratiṣṭhitā
tam krameṇa mahābāho yathāvaj jaya pārthiva*

Bīṣmadeva told Yudhiṣṭhīra, “Four spiritual orders—the Brahmachārī, Gṛhastha, Vānaprastha, and Sanyāsa—are actually described in the Vedic scriptures as four stages to obtain the Supreme Lord. They should be followed properly and systematically.” (Mahābhārat Śānti-parva 20.4)

Whether one is a celibate student (Brahmachārī), a householder (Gṛhasthī), a retired person (Vānaprasthī), or is in the renounced (Sanyāsī), if he has the Supreme Lord Harī in his heart, his mouth chants His holy names, his stomach contains food that was first offered to Lord Harī, has had *charaṇāmīṭa* touched to his head, and his body is decorated with garlands worn by Lord Harī—such a person is considered to be a Vaiṣṇava.

GRHASTHAS AND VAIŚNAVA ASSOCIATION

*ye tyakta loka dharmārthā viṣṇu bhakti vaśāṁ gatāḥ
bhajanti paramātmānāṁ tebhyo nityāṁ namo namaḥ*

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"Any householder who is not attached to his children, his wife, the *varṇāśrama* system, wealth, or even to liberation, and wholeheartedly engages in worshipping Lord Śrī Viṣṇu with true devotion—to such a devotee, I, Sūta Goswāmī, pay my obeisances again and again." (Nārāyaṇa Vyūha)

Lord Kapiladeva said that every learned person knows very well that attachment to material things is the greatest impediment to liberation and causes one to remain entangled in the cycle of birth and death. But if someone becomes attached to a self-realized devotee, it opens the door to liberation. Moreover, the association of a real devotee is certainly nectarean and unadulterated by the poison of material miseries. In other words, when demigods had previously obtained nectar from the ocean, after laboriously working to churn the ocean, they obtained nectar along with poison. But the association of a pure devotee is superior to that nectar because the association of a pure devotee awards eternal spiritual pleasure. That is why the association of a pure devotee is called the source of all perfection. A materially minded householder cannot appreciate the value of saintly association because his mind always remains unsteady in regard to spiritual life, that is why he does not take spiritual instructions very seriously. Lord Yamarāja tells his messengers in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (6.3.28) to seize such householders who are not serious about spiritual life, but totally immersed in material affairs without focusing on the topic of their liberation.

*deva pūjāparo yasya gṛhe vaśati sarvadā
tatraiva sarvadevaś ca hariścaiva śriyānvitah*

"If in anyone's house, a real Vaiṣṇava (worshiper of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa) comes to live for quite some time again and again, all the demigods and Lord Śrī Hari, along with Lakṣmīdevī, undoubtedly reside there." (Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa)

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It is recommended that a householder should always look for more mercy. Even if he is a qualified devotee himself, he should deal with other real Vaiṣṇavas sincerely and invite them to his house, give them shelter, food, clothing, medicines, and anything else that is required for them to be comfortable. It is stated, *atithī devo bhava*: “One should give proper respect to and welcome a saintly guest.” It is also stated, *kevalāgho bhavati kevalādi*: “One who enjoys eating alone, without caring for a saintly guest, is a thief in the eyes of God.” (Yajurveda, Śuklapakṣa) But one should be careful in this matter about the swindlers who may be living in the garb of a real saint. One should carefully avoid them.

*annadaū jaladaś caiva āturaś caiva cikitsakah
trividham dharmaṁ āyāti vinā yajñena bhārata*

“Anyone who supplies eatables, drinking water, medicines, or any other required items to a Vaiṣṇava who requires them attains heaven, or obtains steady devotion to the Supreme Lord, without performing any austerity.” (Mahābhārat)

A householder should keep in his home and daily study, hear, and worship Vaiṣṇava scriptures and never feel burdened by a Vaiṣṇava guest. Anyone who ridicules or becomes upset or angry with a Vaiṣṇava will become bereft of purity, experience loss of income, religiousness, prestige, and will experience turmoil in the family. Material nature becomes very angry with a person who kicks, criticizes, angers, envies, or disrespects a real Vaiṣṇava. Therefore a Vaiṣṇava should be handled very carefully, and one should serve him honestly with whatever it takes to please him and receive his benediction. This is the power and potency of a *śuddha-bhakta* (a pure Vaiṣṇava). The Viṣṇu Purāṇa states that when a Gṛhastha (householder) receives a saintly person in his house, he should become very glad and serve him wholeheartedly according to his capacity. By serving a real

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Vaiśnava in this way, the householder is simultaneously serving all the demigods combined in one body of that Vaiśnava. (See how Nanda Mahārāja welcomed his Vaiśnava guest in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 10.8.4)

*nyāyārjitaḥ sādhanaiś ca dāna homārcanādikāṁ
akuryānnaced adho yāti bhaktyā kurvannāpi dvija
yatnāt siddhair nijaiḥ śuddhair dravyair dhānyo 'rcayet prabhūm
pūjā dravyāny āśaktaś ced dadyād ikṣetavārcanam*

"A Gr̄hastha should regularly perform meritorious activities as per the best of his ability and capacity. The activities should include giving of charity to an authentic devotee, performing sacrifices, and worshiping the Supreme Lord, with properly earned money. If a Gr̄hastha does not use his money for such activities, he degrades himself to the lower planetary systems. Therefore, it is advised that a Gr̄hastha earn money by proper means and worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead as per the system stated here. Actually, if someone is honestly unable to do so, he should simply watch someone else following this rule of worshipping the Lord, or, according to his means, give him some items of worship so as to assist in pleasing the Lord." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 11.50, 51)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī, in his Dīgdarśinī-tikā, states that any householder who is faithful to the Supreme Personality of Godhead must earn money through proper means and help in pleasing the Supreme Lord. If one does this, then such a person is considered to be very fortunate if he does this according to the best of his ability. In whatever way, participating in service for the pleasure of the Lord is the essence here.

*vidyā vivādāya dhanam adāya śaktim pareśāya para piḍanāya
khalaś ca sādho viparītam etat jñānāya dānāya ca rakṣaṇāyah*

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"A wicked person, if he is educated, shows off his learning by using it to make false arguments. If he is rich, he uses it to show off his arrogance and controls others to obtain respect. If he is physically strong, he uses it to torture or chastise others. But contrary to this, a saintly person acts opposite to the wicked and uses their knowledge by uplifting others' consciousness, by using their wealth they give charity to the authentic Vaiṣṇava and to those who are honestly in need of emergency help, and use their physical strength to protect the Vaiṣṇava, the weak, and humble." (Nīti Śāstra)

The Yājñavalkya Smṛuti states, "There is no better charity than teaching others about the science of the soul. There is no better austerity than to becoming self-realized. There is no purer place of pilgrimage than performing devotional service. Keeping purity is the best ornament to decorate oneself."

There are two classes of people—one who has wholeheartedly embraced the facilities of sense gratification, and the other who has relinquished them honestly. Among these two, the latter is superior because if there is even one hole in a water pot and it is not repaired immediately, then all the water gradually will leak out. Similarly, if one of the senses of a person remains attached to a sense object and is not controlled soon, then a person's real intelligence gradually becomes lost. Therefore, the results of pious activities are the only friend of a person in this world because these pious results remain with the person even after death. Everything else, including the spouse, children, wealth, and friends remains unhelpful at the time of death. The only actual help is spiritual life, which goes with the soul at death.

*na jātu viṣayaḥ ke 'pi svarāmarāḥ harṣayanty amī
śallakī pallava pṛitam ivaibhām nimbi pallavā*

"There is no sense gratifying object in this world that can

please a self-realized soul because once one has sincerely tasted spiritual life, material life does not taste right, just as an elephant who is happy by eating *śallakī* (a kind of sweet tree) leaves does not feel happy by eating bitter neem leaves.” (Aśṭāvakra-gītā 17.3)

In this regard, there is a history about a saintly person and a king. A saintly person became friendly with a king and decided to live with a king who was pious. The saintly person lived with the king in his palace and enjoyed his facilities for a long time. One day, that saintly person died a natural death, and seeing the saintly person die, the king got a shock and also died.

This incident of the king and saintly person was being realized in meditation by another saintly person who was situated a considerable distance away from the palace and laughed to himself at the situation of the king’s and the saintly person’s death. At that time a man was sitting near him and asked the saintly person about the reason for his laughing. He asked, “O saintly person, why are you laughing without any reason?” The saint replied, “I never laugh without some reason. I am laughing because of what happened to the king and a saintly person while living in the palace. The saintly person died, and seeing this, the king also died with a heart failure. The king was taken to the spiritual world, whereas the saint was taken to hell. Since the king was always thinking of how to satisfy the saintly person, he remained detached from his worldly affairs and thus went to Vaikunṭha (spiritual world). But the saintly person’s mind was always engaged in enjoying the royal situation, and therefore he forgot about the science of self-realization and thus went to hell.”

The conclusion is that no matter how much one is externally detached from worldly things, ultimately one must be truly detached from material things and be attached to the service of the Supreme Lord. Then only the ultimate goal of life can be attained. It is true that when one has honestly

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experienced the taste of transcendental devotional service to Kṛṣṇa, material objects do not satisfy that person.

THE QUALITIES AND ACTIVITIES OF A BRĀHMĀNA

*nārāyaṇāyudhair nityam cihito yasya vigrahaḥ
pāpa koṭi śatarām dagdham tasmin dṛṣṭe mahāmune
śaṅkha-cakra ūrdhva-puṇḍrādi dhārayed brahmaṇaḥ sadā
śrāddhādi sarva karmārha ity uktaḥ kim atāḥ param*

Śrī Śūta Goswāmī said, "O great sage, just by seeing someone whose body is marked with Tilaka in the shape of Lord Nārāyaṇa's weapons, one's sins become burnt into ashes. Therefore, a Brāhmaṇa should always mark his body with Lord Nārāyaṇa's weapons, such as His club and disc, along with *tilaka* marks on different parts of his body. By doing so, what more needs to be said, he becomes qualified to perform spiritual ceremonies, beginning with the *śrāddha* (oblations to forefathers) ceremony." (Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa)

A real Brāhmaṇa truly knows about the Absolute Truth. He acts perfectly, and his dedication to the Lord is systematic and never contrary to Vedic scriptures. He goes to the temple to worship the Lord or worships the Deity at home, and he pays obeisance to the Lord daily. According to the Mahābhārat, Śāntiparva, by paying obeisance to the Lord even once, one achieves the result of performing ten horse sacrifices. A performer of a horse sacrifice goes to heaven and, after his merits expire there, he returns to this world, but a Brāhmaṇa, due to his paying obeisance to the Lord goes to the spiritual world and does not return to this world again. For this reason, authentic and qualified Brāhmaṇas are respected in all circumstances.

rākṣasāḥ kalim āśritya jāyante brahma yoniṣu

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utpannā brāhmaṇa kule vādhante śrotriyān kṛśān

“The demons from previous ages who were not killed by the Lord take their birth in the Brāhmaṇa dynasty in Kaliyuga. Thus, being against the Brāhmaṇas and the demigods, they, by nature, create problems for the true Brāhmaṇas who actually live by their merit, give them a bad name, and thus destroy the real Brāhminical order by their unwanted actions.” (Varāha Purāṇa)

*kali yuge rākṣasa sakal vipra-ghare
janmivek sujaner himsā karivare*

“The demons who were killed in their last life have now, in Kaliyuga, taken birth in the homes of qualified Brāhmaṇas, but due to their past bad nature, they create trouble and torture and envy the perfectly authentic Brāhmaṇas who live by their merits.” (Chaitanya Bhāgavata, Ādi 11.294)

*vṛntākām jāliśākām ca kuṣumbha asmāntakām
palāndu lasunām śuklām niryāsan caiva varjayet
grjanām kinśukām caiva kukuṇḍāñca tathaiva ca
uḍumbaram alāvuñ ca jagdhvā patati vai dvijāḥ*

“Twice-born people who are spiritually initiated should not eat eggplants (Vaiśṇavas do not eat green or white varieties of eggplants, brinjal), banana flower, sunflower leaves, the center part of the banana tree trunk, onions, or garlic. They should not eat sour gruel (*kāñjī-bhāṭ*) or the sap of a tree. They should also give up eating turnips, beets, carrots, sprouts or shoots of grains, forest figs, and *peṭhā* (white pumpkin, also known as winter melon). If a twice-born Brāhmaṇa eats these items, he becomes degraded.” (Kūrma Purāṇa)

One should not offer such rejected things as stated in the above text to the Lord. The Hārīta Smṛuti states, *na abhakṣyam*

naivedyārthe “One should not offer things that are rejected by the scriptures to the Supreme Lord.” Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī also explains in his *Digdarśinī-tīkā*: “It is forbidden to offer to the Lord any food that is said to be inedible for the Brāhmaṇa.” A twice-born Brāhmaṇa follows this rule without any argument, because it is recommended by the scriptures and is accepted by the great devotees such as the six Goswāmīs of Vrindāban.

*yatra madyam tathā mārisam tathā vṛntāka mūlake
nivedayen naiva tatra herer aikāntikī ratīḥ*

“If someone offers the Lord any food that is mixed with wine, meat, white or green eggplants, or beets, then that person will not obtain unalloyed devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is the caretaker of all beings.” (*Viṣṇu-yamala*)

Lord Kṛṣṇa is hungry for love, not for any kind of food substance. As He stated in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, *tad aham bhakty upahṛtam asnami* (9.26), “I eat the offering because it is offered to Me with love and devotion.” Everything that one sees in this world has come from the Lord, and thus everything is owned by Him; therefore He does not require anything from anyone because He is fully self-satisfied (*ātmārāma*). He only wants His devotee’s love. If one actually loves someone, that person will give anything that is required by the person. Lord Kṛṣṇa wants everyone to worship Him with love and devotion. That is why devotees practice devotional service wholeheartedly; so, one day, they may obtain love of Godhead. According to the standards of Vedic civilization, such food as meat, wine, beets, onion, garlic, and carrots are said to be contaminated food and thus are rejected to offer to the Lord or to be eaten.

*śruti smṛti ubhe netre viprāṇāṁ parikīrtite
ekena vikalāḥ kāṇo dvābh्यāṁ andhāḥ prakīrtitāḥ*

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"The Śrutis and Smṛutis are said to be the two eyes of the twice-born Brāhmaṇa. If he is deficient in one of these, he is said to be one-eyed and if he is deficient in both, he is called a blind Brāhmaṇa." (Viṣṇu Smṛuti)

A twice-born person follows the Vedic scriptures correctly. The Śrutis mean the words of God, such as the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gītā, and the Smṛutis mean books about God, such as the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam and the Purāṇas. A twice-born Brāhmaṇa is expected to be a teacher on these subjects, but if he himself is bereft of knowledge of either one of these, he is considered to be a one-eyed teacher. If he is bereft of knowing both of these, he is called a blind teacher. A Brāhmaṇa who is truly expert in Vedic standards should teach others without expecting any fixed salary. In this way, he can offer his learning and teaching ability to the Supreme Lord by turning others into Vaiṣṇavas. This is the perfection of learning the Vedas. Low-class Brāhmaṇas and so-called Vaiṣṇavas who earn their livelihood out of their learning are considered fallen. But one who is a real twice-born Brāhmaṇa always engages in the welfare of others by teaching spiritual life, as a donation to human society, without expecting anything in return.

*pāyasaṁ snehapakvaṁ yad gorasaṁ caiva śaktavaḥ
anyakān caiva talañca sūdrād grāhyam tathaiva ca*

"Any learned Brāhmaṇa or a Vaiṣṇava, after paying the required price, can buy, even from a Śūdra, sweets, ghee, deep-fried eatable foods, milk, śaktu (dry roasted grains and then turned into flour), oil cakes, and oil." (Kūrma Purāṇa)

A twice-born Brāhmaṇa should not eat in a Śūdra's house or from a Śūdra's hands. For any reason, whether due to uncontrolled senses, illusion, or in a difficult situation, a Brāhmaṇa should not accept edibles from a Śūdra born non-devotee. If he does, then that Brāhmaṇa becomes a Śūdra.

The reason is that the sins of a person reside in their cooked food. Therefore, if a person eats food cooked by someone else, he is actually eating the food along with that person's sins. But the possessions of a Vedic Brāhmaṇa are considered to be pure because he lives his life as per Vedic rules. The Padma Purāṇa states that an intelligent person, to become free from sins, should go and ask for some food from a Vaiṣṇava Brāhmaṇa. If he is not easily found then one should endeavor to search out and approach him to obtain some food. But if one cannot obtain food from him, then he should request a cup of water from the Brāhmaṇa, because it is purifying. Only in an emergency can a qualified Brāhmaṇa accept sweets or deep-fried food from a Sūdra, after paying for the goods. The Atri Saṁhitā states that one should not accept water, sweet rice, or salt directly from a Sudra, even by payment, for it will reduce the quality of purity derived from the spiritual practice.

A saintly person who carefully serves the Supreme Personality of Godhead develops the following qualities: patience, forgiveness, being self-managed, religiousness, cleanliness, purity, control over the senses, having realized knowledge, good manners, truthfulness, proper etiquette, and freedom from personal anger. These twelve pious symptoms automatically appear in a sincere devotee. By these symptoms, one can recognize how deeply one has entered into serving the Supreme Lord. According to Manu Mahārāja these qualities are maintained by what we eat. Grains obtained from a twice-born Brāhmaṇa are considered equal to nectar. Grains obtained from a Kṣatriya are like milk. Grains from a Vaiśya are said to be grains. But grains from a Śūdra are said to be equal to blood; in other words, they are not to be accepted. If one has controlled his eating habits, he will develop the power to discern between meritorious and non-meritorious action.

It is stated in the Varāha Purana that after worshiping the Lord one should offer Him sumptuous food and then eat the

remnants for his own liberation. If one does so then what could be more pleasing in this world than this? Offering one's food to the Lord removes all one's sins and turns one's heart towards obtaining love of Godhead. Therefore, only after making an offering to the Lord should one honor the leftovers. Just as rice can be eaten only after cooking, so food should be eaten only after offering it to the Lord. For anyone who, after cooking, offers their food to the Lord along with putting Tulasi leaves on each of the preparations, the Lord accepts that offering. A twice-born should chant the sixth Gāyatrī mantra and sprinkle a little water from a conchshell around the plate of food. The Digdarśinī-tīkā states, "One should neither eat nor sleep in front of the Deity in the temple, but in household worship in one's home, these things are permitted even in front of their worshippable Lord. A Brāhmaṇa should eat sitting facing East or North. A Kṣatriya should eat sitting facing West and Vaiśyas and Śūdras should eat sitting facing South. The drinking water cup should be on the right side of the eating plate. If the water cup is placed on the left side it is considered to be equal to wine. One can, however, honor the Lord's *māhā-prasāda* (Holy food obtained directly from the Lord's plate) while facing any direction. One should eat only using the right hand and keep the left hand uncontaminated and untouched. By following this standard of Vedic life of eating, one develops qualities of a twice-born devotee, thus making rapid spiritual advancement.

*dharmañ ca satyañ ca damas tapaś ca
amātsaryam hrīs titikṣā anusūyāḥ
yajñāś ca dānañ ca dhrtih śrutañ ca
vratāni vai dvādaśa brāhmaṇasya ca*

"The codes of conduct for a twice-born Brāhmaṇa are religiosity, truthfulness, sense control, austerity, non-enviousness, shyness, forgiveness, non-jealousy, performance of

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sacrifices, giving charity and accepting charity, patience, and being well-versed in Vedic wisdom." (Mahābhārat)

A person who develops firm faith and devotion unto the Supreme Lord and whose senses remain under control, even though that person may have been born into a low-class family, is considered better than a non-Vaiṣṇava Brāhmaṇa, because the Padma Purāṇa states that one should not even touch a non-Vaiṣṇava Brāhmaṇa. One who is truly an unalloyed devotee of the Lord is never considered a low-class person, because the social orders relate only to the illusory world, *prabhū kahe-ehobāhya* (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta Madhya 8.59), whereas a real devotee of the Lord is related to the transcendental world. One who considers a true devotee of the Lord to belong to a particular caste is simply an offender, *vaiṣṇave jāti buddhiḥ yasya va naraki sah*. Therefore, the stage of a real Vaiṣṇava is the post-graduate stage of being a Brāhmaṇa.

*kṣātrāṁ karma dvija-yoktaṁ vaiśya-ṁ karma tathāpadī
rājanya-yasya ca vaiśya-yoktaṁ sūdra karma na caitayoḥ*

"At times of difficulty or in emergency, a Brāhmaṇa may accept the occupation of a Vaiṣya or a Kṣatriya, and a Kṣatriya may take up the occupation of a Vaiṣya. But they should never take up the occupation of the Śūdra or working for others for a payment." (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3.8.39)

A twice-born Brāhmaṇa should never harm anyone in any way. He should always engage in benefiting others and this is his wealth. Specifically, a Brāhmaṇa should not engage in Śūdra propensities. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3.12.45 states, "Using the mind, words, and actions, an intelligent Brāhmaṇa should work in such a way that his services benefit every living entity while they remain alive and after death they get promoted to the superior world." The Nīti Śāstra states:

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*uttamā bhiksukā viprā madhyamā kṛṣi-kārikā
vāṇijyā patitā viprā Śūdrāṇāṁ para-sevakāḥ*

"The best occupation for a high quality learned Brāhmaṇa is to go house to house to give instructions, and whatever donations are obtained from that, they maintain themselves with. Such a Brāhmaṇa is called the top quality and the best of all the Brāhmaṇas. If a Brāhmaṇa engages in agriculture and tilling land to grow crops, then that Brāhmaṇa is considered to be a second class Brāhmaṇa. A Brāhmaṇa who engages in trade or business is said to be a fallen Brāhmaṇa. And a Brāhmaṇa who works for others for receiving a salary is considered to be equal to a Śūdra."

A learned Brāhmaṇa is accepted to be the Spiritual Master of the human society, including the Kṣatriyas, the Vaiśyas, and the Śūdras, and a Sanyāsī is considered to be the Spiritual Master of the Brāhmaṇas. In the social section of the *varṇāśrama* system, a Brāhmaṇa is recognized by the last name Sharmā, and the last name of a Kṣatriya should be Varmā. A Vaiśya's and Śūdra's last names should be Guptā and Dāsa, respectively.

ACTIVITIES AND QUALITIES OF THE GRHASTHA

*na snānāyan na svapen nagno na caiva upaśprṣed budhaḥ
mukta keśaś ca nācamed devādy arcane varjayet*

"Those who are intelligent householders are never naked, either while brushing their teeth or rinsing their mouth, while bathing, or while sleeping. Also, they should not take āchamana (sip water for purification) or worship God without tying their sīkhā (tuft of hair on the head)." (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3.12.19)

A householder takes *āchamana* to perform his *śārdhyā* (chanting of Gāyatrī three times a day). He chants his Gāyatrī in the morning when the stars are still seen in the sky, at noon, and in the evening when the sun is going to set. While following this recommendation of spiritual life properly, the Lord decides to come and live with him. Wherever the Lord resides, the Goddess of Fortune also follows there. Thus, a householder is able to support the Sanyāsīs and Brahmachārīs. If a householder is engaged only in sense gratification and sleeps until sunrise, he will be overcome with poverty. Therefore, it is stated in the Skanda Purāṇa, Kāśī-khaṇḍa, that if a householder bathes early in the morning, he achieves enthusiasm, fructified intelligence, good fortune, beauty, income, and happiness. After bathing and putting on *tilaka*, one should worship the Deity and then go about his profession.

*sevā ādi niyamo devālaye devasya ceṣṭate
prāyah sva-gehe svachanda sevā sva-vrata rakṣayā*

"When a Gr̥hastha (householder) worships the Supreme Lord in the temple, he must follow the rules and regulations properly and be punctual, but when he worships his own deity in his house, he can do as he likes, as long as he does not break his personal vows." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 8.503)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī, in his *Digdarśinī* commentary states that when a twice-born Gr̥hastha worships the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the temple, he has to observe special rules of worship, such as the instructions laid down for worship, the proper time, ingredients, exact amount of food, following the intervals of *āratīs* (a worship in which a lit ghee lamp or camphor is moved circularly clockwise facing the Deity) and so on. But at home, the Lord's worship is performed as one's time warrants, and as per the circumstances and situations. He must also hold festivals and programs honoring the Lord.

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*yatra kutrāpi pratimāṁ veda dharma samanvitāṁ
na paśyanti janā gatvā te daṇḍyā yama kirikaraiḥ*

"If a Deity has been installed according to the proper Vedic rules of the inauguration process in the temple and a Grhastha does not go to see that Deity regularly, he certainly becomes a candidate to be punished by Yamarāja through his messengers." (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 11.63)

Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī remarks in this regard, "Wherever it may be, whether the temple is difficult to reach or easy to reach, when the Supreme Lord's Deity is established according to Vedic principles, he must go to see Him and worship Him at least once a year."

If a Grhastha desires happiness in this world and liberation at the end, he should worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead and give charity regularly. Whether he has many material desires, has no material desires, or only desires liberation, he must follow this rule. If a householder wants to increase his wealth, he must give charity regularly in the mode of goodness. As it is stated by Lord Brahmā to Nārada Muni in the Skanda Purāṇa, if one gives charity to a qualified and authentic Vaiṣṇava who is a real Brāhmaṇa, he certainly achieves liberation. As per Vedic civilization, only a real Brāhmaṇa who is a Vaiṣṇava Sanyāsī who lives as per Vedic rules is authorized to receive charity from the householders.

*dānam dadāti yah śudro mahatyām api cāpadī¹
yaś ca tasmai samprādadyād tau ubhau narakau dhrvam*

"A householder should not give charity to a low-born person who might look like or act like a devotee, or even who lives a life like a mendicant or is experiencing some troubles, because by giving charity to such a person, both the charity giver and the charity taker certainly go to hell, because of being

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inconsiderate while giving and accepting the charity. Therefore giving charity must be done carefully in life." (Padma Purāṇa)

*ye svadharmāt apetebhyāḥ prayacchānty alpa-buddhayaḥ
śatāṁ varṣāṇi te pretya puriṣāṁ bhuñjate janāḥ*

"Those who do not have investigative intelligence give charity without considering the low-birth of the charity recipient and just give by seeing their conversion to devotional garb and having adopted the prescribed duty of someone else. Such people, after death, take birth as stool-eaters for one hundred years." (Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva 26.29)

*anarhate yad dadāti na dadāti yad-arhate
arhānarha pariṣṭānād dāna-dharmo’pi duṣkaraḥ*

"Those who do not give charity to those who are authorized by the scriptures to receive the charity but give it to those who are not authorized to receive charity and, due to not having the knowledge of who is authorized to receive charity and who is not, giving charity in this way to receive merits becomes a problem after death." (Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva 26.30)

*labdhānam api vittānāṁ boddhavyau dvav atikramau
apātre pratipattiś ca pātre ca apratipādanam*

"Two kinds of mistakes occur when money is earned which have to always be remembered: one is to withhold charity from those who are authorized to receive charity and the second is donate to those who are not unauthorized to receive it." (Mahābhārat Śānti-parva 26.31)

*yad gṛhe nāsti tulasī śālagrāma śilārcane
smaśāna sadṛśāṁ vidyate tad gṛham Śubha varjitaṁ*

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"If a householder does not have a Tulasī plant in his house to perform his daily worship, his house is considered to be impure and brings inauspiciousness." (Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa)

A Brāhmaṇa in pure consciousness will have much facility for worshiping the Lord in his house because a Brāhmaṇa is supposed to have at least eight good qualifications, as stated in the Bhagavad Gītā (18.42). Presently, due to the influence of Kaliyuga, most of the Brāhmaṇas have lost their good qualities; still, they are given a chance to take advantage of the present facility of their high birth in the Brāhmaṇa families to become properly elevated spiritually and not become degraded.

*yad gr̥he tulasi bhāti rakṣābhir jalasecanaiḥ
tad gr̥ham yama dūtaś ca dūrato varjayanti hi*

"The messengers of Yamarāja remain far away from a householder's house where Tulasī Mahārāṇī is very carefully protected and watered regularly." (Padma Purāṇa, Kārtika-mahātmya)

The messengers of Yamarāja do not come to a house where Tulasī is protected. The Supreme Lord resides in that house because Tulasī is His beloved. As the Lord said to Garuḍa in the Skanda Purāṇa, "O king of the birds, Garuḍa; if a person has planted a garden of Tulasī, either in the forest or in his house, I truthfully say that that person has won the seven planetary systems." Tulasi is inconceivably dear to the Supreme Lord.

*ṛtu kālābhigāmī yaḥ sva dārā nirataś ca yaḥ
sa sadā brahmačārīha vijñeya san gr̥hāśramī
ṛtuḥ ṣoḍaśa yāminyaś cataśras tāṣu garhitah
putras tāṣv api yugmas tu ayugmaḥ kanyakāḥ smṛtaḥ*

"Any Gr̥hastha who copulates with his wife only to

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conceive a child is also called a *Brahmachārī*, or celibate. There are sixteen nights when conception is possible. As per Vedic scriptures starting from the first day of the menstrual discharge, the following four nights are rejected and criticized by for copulation. Of the remaining days, on the even numbered days he begets a son, and on the odd numbered days he produces a daughter." (Skanda Purāṇa and Padma Purāṇa)

*taporthīyam brāhmaṇi dhatta garbhāṁ
gaurvodharāṁ dhāvitaram turangau
śudra dasam paśu-pālam ca vaiśya
vadhārthīyam tvad-vidhā rāj-putri*

The Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa told Gāndhārī, "A Brāhmaṇa's wife produces her male child for performing austerities, a cow produces a male calf to pull heavy loads, a mare produces its horse baby to run fast, the Śūdra's wife produces her male child to work for others, and princesses like you produce sons to die while fighting in a war." (Mahābhārat, Strī-parva 16.5)

When a Gṛhastha wants to have a child, he should copulate with his wife with the permission of his Spiritual Master. There are strong restrictions regarding copulation. If one is serious to get out of this material world, he should not be unrestricted in copulation. He should follow the Vedic instructions laid out in the Vedic scriptures for a Gṛhastha to become purified.

*vihāya sva kalatrāñ ca yo gṛhṇāti para striyam
lobhāt kāma sukhād vāpi so'dhamo nātra samśayah
pātayitvā sa ca pated daśa purvān daśa parān saha
tyaktvā sva svāmīnām yā ca param gacchati kāmataḥ*

Lord Nārāyaṇa said, "Any householder who ignores his

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wife, and due to being infatuated by lust, goes to enjoy another's wife is undoubtedly degraded. As a result, he goes to hell along with a total of ten generations of his family, both past and future. Similarly, that woman who, due to excessive lust, has accepted another married man without caring about her husband, also achieves the same result as the man." (Vairāgyamārtanḍa 6.101, 102)

The messengers of Yama-Dharmarāja said, "For extra sense gratification, copulation with another's wife may seem pleasurable for a moment, but this moment of sense pleasure will cause misery for many, many years in hell." It is also stated in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, *loke vavayāmiśa madya sevā nityāśu jantuḥ*: "Those who engage in prostitution, meat-eating, and intoxication—such animal-like people are put for a long time into hell. Mahārāja Parīkṣit kindly allowed the personality of Kali to live in places where these sinful activities are performed. One should carefully remain unaffected by them. Satisfying lust is nectarean in the beginning but is like poison in the end because it takes one to the house of Yamarāja and one forgets about the gate to liberation."

*yāvat kāmādi dīpyeta yāvat saṁsāra vāsanā
yāvad indriya cāpalyam tāvat tatva-kathā kutah*

"As long as one is burning in the fire of lusty desires, as long as one is inclined to enjoy the material pleasures of this world, and as long as one has uncontrolled senses, where is the chance of self-realization for that person?" (Kulārṇava-rahaśya 1)

Manu Mahārāja said, "The desire for sense gratification can never be satisfied even by an unlimited and continuous supply of sense objects for a long period of time. It instead always increases like a fire increases when more fuel is supplied to it. But one whose mind is not disturbed by the sense objects, whose heart does not burn by the heat of wrath, who is not tied

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with the rope of greed for more money, who does not feel disturbed when desire for sense gratification enters within the mind—such a sober and steady devotee conquers over the three worlds.” This precious human life is a medium to the gateway to liberation, and at least one should aim to reach heaven within this life. After receiving such a valuable human form, who is that wise person who will not take advantage of it and waste such a valuable chance just collecting money and wealth, which remains here after death?

Giving up thinking about material sense gratification is the mantra to remove the cholera of hankering. It is the root of happiness, whereas thinking of having sense gratification is the root of unhappiness. Material hankering is like a thunderbolt to the pure soul that causes the soul to fall into hell. Sense gratification is just like a winter season to the soul that increases its miseries by destroying the fields of good qualities. The hankering for sense pleasure is like hail that fall on the lotus flower-like purity and destroys it. It is just like deep ignorance of the long night of the winter season. It is like a wave that brings change and turmoil in one’s ocean of good conduct. It is a vine that climbs on a banyan tree of good thoughts to weaken it. It is like the moon to a blossoming lily of distress. This hankering is just like a box that accumulates the ornaments of wealth in the form of old age, distress, and death. And it is the enjoyment of a maddened elephant of anxieties. Therefore, to become free from this hankering, an intelligent person should immediately take shelter of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and sincerely practice while seriously following the guidelines of a pure devotee.

*caturthe māsi kartavyam śiśo niṣkramanam grhāt
ṣaṣṭhe 'nna prāṣṭānam māsi yad veṣṭam maṅgalam kule*

“A Grhastha should bring his newly born child out of the house to be under the sun on the fourth month, and on the sixth

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month the grain ceremony should be observed for the child while following one's family traditions." (Manu Smṛuti 2.34)

According to Vedic tradition, a householder's house remains contaminated from the day of a child's birth until the eleventh day. Everyone living in the house of a newborn child remains unclean until the day of the name-giving ceremony, which is held with a fire sacrifice on an astrologically calculated auspicious day. Until that day, according to the scriptures, none of the family members are allowed to go to the temple or enter inside the Deity room, cook for the Deity, or even worship the Deity in their own home. They can only chant their prescribed rounds of *japa* and read scriptures. After the name-giving ceremony is held with a fire sacrifice, when the child opens his eyes, a Gṛhastha can bring the child to the temple if desired. Manu Mahārāja says, "The mother becomes purified after eleven days, and the father becomes purified and able to mingle with others after participating in the fire sacrifice." He also says that every twice-born family (Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, and Vaiśya) should observe their child's hair-cutting ceremony according to Vedic principles and their own family tradition either on the first or in the third year, but on an auspicious day. (Manu Smṛuti 5.62).

*tataś ca nāma kurvīta pitaiva daśame 'hani
deva pūrvam ārakhyam hi śarmā varmā ādi samyutam*

"After the tenth day of the birth of a son, a Gṛhastha should observe a name-giving ceremony followed by a fire sacrifice and a feast. The baby boy should be given a godly and masculine name ending with Śarmā, Varmā, or as per one's family tradition." (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3.10.8)

The child should not be given a meaningless, useless, inauspicious, or a criticizable name. The name of a male child should have an even number of syllables that can be pronounced very easily, and the name's last syllable should be

shorter. For example, in the name Nārāyaṇa (Nā-rā-ya-ṇa) there are four syllables, and the last syllable is read short. This name is written “Nārāyaṇa,” but because its last syllable is short, the last vowel is only half pronounced. Thus the name is pronounced “Nārāyaṇ.” But for a female child, the last syllable should be long, as in Rādhā or Sītā, pronounced like “Raadhaa,” or “Seetaa.”

*arcayanti sadā viṣnum manovāk kāya karmabhiḥ
teṣāṁ hi vacanāṁ grāhyāṁ te hi viṣṇu samā matāḥ*

“A Gr̥hastha should accept instruction only from that person who is sincere and seriously worships Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa by always using his body, mind, and words, because such a devotee is considered as pure as Lord Viṣṇu.” (Viṣṇu-rahaṣya)

After hearing from a learned Vaiṣṇava Brāhmaṇa who has sincerely followed the spiritual path for a long time and is not diplomatic, a householder should carefully follow his instructions, because such a devotee is fully purified.

If a Gr̥hastha worships the Lord at home with devotion, following the rules of the scriptures, but did not first receive instructions from his Spiritual Master on how to do it properly, he receives only one percent benefit of the whole merit. The Vaiṣṇava Tantra states that if a householder does not have the proper devotional attitude towards his scripturally authentic Spiritual Master, towards chanting *japa*, and towards the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one should not associate with or listen to him, or accept any of his advice. As per Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, one’s hard-earned money should also be managed according to the instructions of a pure Spiritual Master.

A householder should welcome a Vaiṣṇava with respect and offer him edibles, a seat, and bedding, and according to his capacity he should give charity. Especially if the Vaiṣṇava has come from a long distance, has no income, has no fixed place to

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live, or does not have enough food to eat regularly, or has arrived at his house speaking sweetly and is interested in his benefit, then the Grhastha should supply everything as per his requirement. If the householder follows this rule, then his acts are said to be perfect and he is blessed with the highest abode of the Supreme Lord at the end.

BONDAGE OF A GRHASTHA

*narasya bandhanārthāya śrīkhalā strī prakīrtitā
loha baddho'pi mucuseta strī baddho naiva mucusate*

"Woman is said to be the greatest shackle for a man and vice-versa. A person in iron shackles can somehow free himself, but anyone who is caught hold by the rope of affection for a woman cannot be freed." (Devī-bhāgavata)

A materially entangled householder, enamored by his bodily extensions, such as wife and children, forgets his proper duty of human life, devotional service to the Lord. At the time of death, such a sinful householder is caught by the ropes of the messengers of death on one side, and by the rope of affection for his family members on the other. He fearfully cries like a frog in the mouth of a serpent, saying, "O dear wife, O dear sons, O my wealth, please relieve me from this fearful death." But unfortunately no one can save him from death. But a fortunate householder, however, inquires about and follows the proper procedure of spiritual life seriously. Such a householder learns how to be an ideal householder like Ambarīṣa Mahārāja, the Pāṇḍavas, Vidura Mahārāja, and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, and not to be independent minded or a whimsical householder. An independent minded Grhastha is prone to become a *grhamedhī* (a sense gratifier henpecked husband or a dancing doll in the

hands of his wife). Such a class of householder comes under the control of death personified.

In this connection, there is a history. One man took to spiritual life while he was still very young and became a Sanyāsī. He lived incognito in a forest for a long time and never came to any habitation. After a long time passed, one day, he decided to go to holy places of pilgrimage. On the way, he saw a marriage party approaching. Since the Sanyāsī did not know what it was, he asked someone what it was. The reply was that it was a marriage party. Then the Sanyāsī asked who the decorated person was who was mounted on the horse. He was told that it was a boy who was going to marry a girl. The Sanyāsī then asked what will happen after they are married. To this the man replied that when the wife comes to his home, they will enjoy copulation together, and the woman will have children. After hearing that much, the Sanyāsī proceeded on his journey.

On the way, he felt thirsty and he saw a water well with a shady tree nearby. Since he was thirsty and tired, he drank water and fell asleep under the tree. He had a dream that he was married and was sleeping with his wife. When his wife said, "Please move over a little bit," he did so, and fell into the well. When the villagers heard a loud sound caused by his falling into the well, they came running and pulled him out. They asked him who had made him fall into the well. He replied, "In a dream I saw a woman who asked me to move, and when I did, I fell into the well. I really do not know what condition a man falls into when he is actually married to a woman." The lesson learnt from this episode is that for an intelligent man, having an uncooperative wife is like living in a condition of turmoil. One should pray to the Lord so as to make the wife a sincere devotee to have a peaceful household and at last go back to Godhead. A devotee Gr̥hastha couple in which both husband and wife are sincere devotees cannot be matched with anything of this world because they also make their kith and kin into devotees.

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*viśayāśā mahāpāśāt yo vimuktaḥ sudustyajam
sa ekaḥ kalpate muktye nānye sat śāstra-vedināḥ*

"The spirit to enjoy materially and the attachments to family members are the greatest shackles for a Gṛhastha, from which it is very difficult to become free. If any person becomes free from such shackles that person is on the path to liberation and no one else. Even if he is an expert in the six categories of Vedic philosophies but is attached to such things, he cannot be liberated." (Viveka-chūḍāmaṇī)

The Vedic scriptures are not one sided. They speak about both sides. For example, the Vedic scriptures state that for a man, woman is the shackles and for a woman, man is the shackles, thus keeping each other away from liberation. Both should be careful about each other in order to become a spiritual candidate for liberation. But if one of them accepts the other to serve the Lord by producing Kṛṣṇa conscious children, then both, along with their children, also become blessed by the Lord. However, if one of them becomes attracted materially because of the beautiful arms of the opposite gender, which look just like serpents, and craves to be embraced unrestrictedly, then how can anyone hope for liberation? In this situation, a man becomes a dancing dog in the hands of a woman and the woman becomes a dancing doll of a charmer. When children take birth, they speak nicely with broken language that sounds like the singing of a cuckoo, and thus the parents become captivated and happy, thus forgetting the purpose of human birth. As the poet Tulasī dāsa says in his Dohāvalī:

*dina kā bāghinī rāta kā dākini palaka palaka rahi chūse
duniyāni saba baurā hoke ghar ghar bāghini pūse*

"An ungrateful wife in the house is compared to a tigress during the daytime because of her demands for material

supplies, and she is compared to a witch at night due to her demand for material enjoyment. In this way, she torments the man at every moment. Still, due to madness, many people in this world maintain at least one tigress in each house."

Anyone who is devoid of spiritual training is unable to give up his intense craving for material enjoyment, even though one becomes physically old. Having gray hair, failing eyesight, and maybe falling down at every step due to invalidity, still one desires to enjoy material pleasures, not thinking about one's approaching death. But those who are intelligent think, before facing the court of death, let me prepare for it by appointing a lawyer-like authentic Guru and engaging in devotional service so I do not fail on judgment day.

MATERIAL ENJOYMENT ALWAYS ENDS IN FRUSTRATIONS

*sukhasya anantaram duhkham dukhasya anantaram sukham
dvayam etadd hi jantunam alanghyam dina ratri vat*

Lord Rāma said to Sugrīva, "All living entities, after experiencing displeasures, have to experience pleasures, and after passing through joyful times have to experience miseries again. This situation of enjoying and suffering is as unavoidable as day changing into night and night changing into day." (Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa)

Everyone but the devotees is riding on the chariot of the mind, which is pulled by the horse-like senses, and is driven by the charioteer of intense greed. Only those who have humbly taken shelter at the lotus feet of a scripturally authentic and qualified Spiritual Master can free themselves from the duality of pleasure and pain. The bodily concept of life is the only thing that keeps one under the control of Māyā (the illusory energy of

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the Lord). Therefore, an intelligent person should humbly beg a pure devotee for his mercy by saying, "O Vaiśnava, Lord Kṛṣṇa is yours and you are able to give Him to me, for such is your power. I am indeed a wretched person, but honestly following you in every way. Please help me. If you don't, then I will simply weep and run behind you crying, while saying, 'Kṛṣṇa! Kṛṣṇa!' " (Śaraṇāgatī) With this mood, the inner eyes for spiritual life will be opened, and spiritual progress will release one from the clutches of the bodily conception to serve Lord Kṛṣṇa without having any false ego.

*bālas tāvat kṛīḍāśaktah taruṇas tāvat taruṇīśaktah
vṛddhas tāvat cintāśaktah pare brahmaṇī ko'pi naśaktah*

Śrīpāda Śaṅkarāchārya prayed, "O Lord Govinda, during childhood everyone is attached to playing. In the youthful stage, one becomes attached to a youthful female, and in old age, one becomes overwhelmed by the anxiety of, 'What have I done with my life and what should be done now?' In this way, practically no one is seriously attracted to You, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is beyond all material conceptions." (Mohamudgara-stotra)

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura also sang a wonderful song explaining about the living entity while in the womb of its mother: *jananī jāthare chilāṁ jakhan* (Bhaktivinod Ṭhākura). He describes that while in the womb, the living entity prays to the Lord to be released from the hellish conditions of the womb. But when it comes out, it is taken care of nicely by its parents, relatives and friends. When he grows up, he goes to school and becomes educated and then gets married. Thus, in due course, he becomes old and becomes filled with anxieties. But, though experiencing so much agony, hardly anyone comes to his senses and becomes inspired to remember his real identity as a human being and serve the Lord sincerely.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Goswāmī Ṭhākura gave an example of a circus that came to a village and made a grand advertisement that seeing this wonderful circus would only cost two cents in Indian coins. Everyone in the village bought tickets, for everyone wanted to enjoy it. The stipulation was that only one person could enter inside the circus at a time. When the first person entered inside, he found that it was completely dark. He somehow found a chair and sat down. He then saw a very dim red light where he saw a strong man sitting. He thought to himself that the circus has begun and now he will enjoy. The strong man laughed and said, "How can you think that this grand arrangement which cost so much could be enjoyed just with only two cents? How can you be so foolish?" The visitor thought to himself, the circus has begun and now I will enjoy. The strong man came closer, criticizing him for being so stupid, but the man thought that he would enjoy now. The strong man gave the person who had come to enjoy a hard slap, almost knocking him unconscious, and told him to get out, and showed him another door to exit through. Although the person felt great pain from the slap, and was humiliated for being made such a fool. He somehow managed to smile while exiting the circus tent. He thought to himself, "Why should I tell others about what happened to me inside? Since I had to suffer, let them suffer too." Thinking in this way, he exited. When everyone asked about his experience inside, he told them that the circus was very wonderful and pleasurable. One by one, they all entered inside the circus and received the same treatment as the first one did. But they all exited the circus smiling so that others would also have that suffering experience. This is the nature of everyone in this material world. This world is like a circus in which one visitor comes in at a time and after experiencing goes out alone. The entrance gate into this world-like circus is different from the exit gate. The entrance gate is called birth and the exit gate is called death. Those experiencing the problems

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of this circus-like world will not tell the truth to their relatives about how much suffering there is in material life and how one goes through the hardships. They only want everyone to experience the same pain that they have gone through, which is why no parents even tell their children about the sufferings and anxiety they have gone through their whole life. They say that it is a wonderful, sweet, and pleasurable life, and to embrace and enjoy it. That is why the scriptures state that this world is made of cheaters and the cheated and is filled with hypocrisy.

A person tries to enjoy the circus of this material nature with two cents representing one day and one night. He enters this circus-like world alone, and also leaves alone. The strong person-like material nature kicks him hard by giving many difficulties and the family gives him unlimited tensions in so many ways, still he goes on smiling to convince others that he is happy and that they can also experience the same from material nature. But no one can guess that he is misleading them and pushing them to suffer. Only an intelligent person can detect the problem and realizes that it is not necessary to experience difficulties, and thus endeavors to find the solution which leads to true happiness. The solution is to surrender at the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord seriously and not be bothered by material problems and anxieties of this circus-like material world.

LIBERATION AND BONDAGE

*mokṣo viṣaya vairāsyam bandho viṣayiko rasah
etāvadeva vijñānam yathecchasi tathā kurū*

“Detachment from sense gratification results in liberation, and engagement in sense gratification results in bondage. This is

the actual knowledge about this world. In this situation, one can decide whichever path one likes to follow." (Aṣṭāvakra-gītā 15.2)

A person who is blind from birth cannot see, and a lusty man, a drunk, and a person who is greedy for money also do not see reality. As the Nīti Śāstra states, *kāmātūrāṇāṁ na bhayam na lajjā*, "Those who are excessively lusty remain attached to sense gratification without caring about any social fear or social shame. But as a human being, one should not be greedy for sense gratification but should engage in cultivation of transcendental knowledge. Only the person who executes spiritual life under the direction of a bona-fide Spiritual Master can achieve the mercy of Lord Kṛṣṇa and go back to Godhead. Only by the positive association of a fixed devotee can one possibly become free from degrading sense gratification. Otherwise, if one remains attached to sense gratification, then not even Lord Śiva or Lord Brahmā, if they came in person, could give him any peace. King Yayāti from the Śrimad Bhāgavatam is an example, who said that whatever eatables, wealth, money, animals, and women are available on the planet are not sufficient to satisfy the material desires for sense gratification of one man. Even if one continues enjoying them for thousands of years, the hankering fire of material enjoyment remains unsatisfied. Therefore, beware of material hankering and transform it into spiritual attachment for ultimate success.

*divase maithunāṁ ye ca kurvate kāma mohitah
rajaśvalā strīyāṁ caiva teśāṁ ruṣṭo 'smi aham sadā*

The Supreme Lord said, "Any householder who, being infatuated with lust, enjoys copulation with his wife during the daytime or while she is passing through her menstrual period, I always remain angry with that man." (Padma Purāṇa, 19.107)

A Gṛhastha should be austere and should control his impulse of infatuation, because unrestricted indulgence in

copulation causes suffering in this life and in the next. Even if the Gṛhastha goes mad due to excessive lusty desires, he should not copulate with his wife when she is passing through her menstrual period. According to the Garuḍa Purāṇa, on the first day of her menstruation, a witch remains in connection with that lady, on the second day she is equal to a dog-eater's wife, and on the third day she is equal to a laundryman's (Śūdra's) wife. Only after her bath on the fourth day does she become a normal lady. Therefore, the husband should not even live in the same room nor should he sit on the same seat with her, what to speak of sleeping with her. Copulating with any female at the time of menstruation, one's good intelligence, brightness, physical strength, eyesight, and duration of life become reduced. Yet, if a Gṛhastha gives up even looking at his wife when she is passing through her menstrual period, he increases his duration of life, brightness, intelligence, physical strength, eyesight, and purity. Those who are familiar with the Vedic law are very careful on these days. Such a knowledgeable lady knows that she should not go to the temple or do any services except for chanting while in this period. The knowledgeable man knows this law, and thus keeps separate from such a lady for that many days. The scriptural law is that a Gṛhastha should not talk with a female who is passing through her menstrual period.

A Gṛhastha should not attend a sacrificial festival without an invitation, but if he is invited he goes there with great joy and serves in whatever way he can. He should be a Vaiṣṇava so he can purify his dependents and help them to go back to Godhead.

As long as one's heart is still dirty with grievously sinful desires, such a person cannot seriously study Vedic scriptures, nor can he genuinely love a bona-fide Spiritual Master. Only when one has acquired merits from many, many past births does that person develop a sincere desire to associate with a saintly person and hear scriptures from him to develop love of Godhead. With devotion, a Gṛhastha should give charity to real

Brāhmaṇa born Vaiṣṇavas, who are fixed in devotion, who are austere, who are pure, and who fast on the proper fasting days.

A Gṛhastha who engages in spiritual activities, copulates with his wife only for the procreation of children, who feeds pure Brāhmaṇa devotees, accepts spiritual initiation from a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master, and chants *japa* of the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra regularly is known as a Vaiṣṇava. Those who do not give up their social and spiritual duties, who have equal vision towards friends and enemies, who do not usurp another's wealth or property, who do not torment anyone, whose mind is completely steady, who are free from ignorance and chant *japa* to please Lord Kṛṣṇa are called Vaiṣṇavas. But those who are not spiritually initiated by a scripturally authorized Spiritual Master, whether they claim to be Brahmachāris, Gṛhasthīs, Vānaprasthīs, or Sanyāsīs, since their worship does not reach the Supreme Lord because their situation is not according to the scriptures, are said to be spiritually degraded. God Himself authorizes His pure devotee to function as Spiritual Master through the Vedic scriptures written in Sanskrit. If someone is initiated by such a Spiritual Master, their service becomes recognized by God. Unless one is registered in the spiritual world, how can one expect their services to reach God? Only a Spiritual Master who is authorized by the Vedic scriptures can register a candidate in God's register in the spiritual world. Thus, any service done for God by that devotee reached Him undoubtedly. It is just like registering a house with the help of a registrar. If the registrar is not appointed by the government, his registering the house is not recognized as registered. Moreover, if one occupies that house, he is called a criminal. The case of those who accept a Spiritual Master who is not authorized by the ancient scriptures of India is similar. God Himself spoke and wrote Vedic scriptures; that is why they have been spiritual authorities since time immemorial. One should carefully follow scriptural evidence so the valuable human life is not wasted in

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the name of following spiritual life. One must be very cautious in this regard.

Prahlāda Mahārāja said in the Skanda Purāṇa, "If in any house there is no Deity worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa a devotee should not eat in that house because their food is considered to be uneatable by sincere devotees."

THE RESULT OF BREAKING THE CHASTITY OF A CHASTE LADY

*pativrataṁ gamane valātkāreṇa niścitan
mātrgāmī bhavet sadyo brahma hatyā śatam bhavet*

Śrīmati Vṛṇḍādevī said, "Anyone who forcibly breaks the chastity of a chaste lady implicates himself with an equal amount of sin as copulating with his own mother, along with the sin of killing one hundred authentic Brāhmaṇas." (Vairāgya-mārtanḍa 6.106)

Ahilyā, the wife of Gautama Ṛṣi, said, "If the mind of a Gṛhastha somehow becomes attached to copulating with another's wife, his religiosity, fame, respect, austerity, intelligence, education, and his charitable nature bear no reward." For a man, there is nothing that will reduce his duration of life more quickly than copulating with another's wife. When one becomes attached to a woman, it becomes very difficult to give up that attachment. Therefore, one should carefully watch oneself and avoid this trouble. As the Nīti Śāstra states:

*durācāri hi puruṣo loke bhavanti ninditāḥ
duḥkha-bhāgī ca satatam vyādhīlpaṇur eva ca*

"Anyone who is loose in character is criticized by everyone in human society, continuously remains miserable,

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remains diseased, and dies quickly, because his duration of life becomes heavily reduced.”

If a Gṛhastha engages in copulation with another’s wife, he goes to a ferocious hell and suffers for as many years as that woman has hair on her body. Therefore, Vedic literatures recommend that a man not look into the eyes of a woman.

VĀNAPRASTHA

*putreṣु bhāryāṁ nikṣipya vanāṁ gacchet sahaiva vā
parṇa-mūla phalāhāraḥ keśasmāśru jatādharah
bhūmi-sāyī bhavet tatra munis sarvātihir nṛpa*

“After completing household life, a man should give charge of his wife to his grown up son and retire to live as a mendicant in the forest or in a temple. There, he should eat simple food which includes leaves, roots, and fruits. He should not cut his hair, but let it grow into matted hair. He should sleep on the floor and should follow the rules and the lifestyle of a saintly person and serve the guests who come to him without being invited.” (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3.9.19)

If a retired person acts as per this verse, he gradually becomes free from sins that he may have gained while living in the Gṛhastha life. Adopting such an austere life burns one’s sins and make one become a meritorious person. While passing through this third *āśrama* (status of life), he becomes fully detached from his family members and his accumulated wealth. He also becomes free from jealousy and envy, thus such a man becomes qualified to enter into the fourth *āśrama* (Sanyāsa).

Vānaprastha life is only for those who desire to learn how to become detached from material affairs and prepare forward to take Sanyāsa. He travels to holy places because it helps develop

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detachment from things to which he was attached to for so long. He also associates with and hears spiritual philosophy from the renounced persons. A Vānaprasthī (retired person) may take his wife along if he so desires, but cannot have any kind of physical relationship with her whatsoever. But when he adopts the Sanyāsa order, the wife cannot stay with him anymore and he cannot keep any connection with any of his family members. Nor can he involve himself in any social or political activities. That is why a Sanyāsī is considered to be socially dead.

It is indeed true that just by sincerely surrendering to the all-pervading and all-powerful personality Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, one's connection to the cycle of repeated birth and death becomes completely removed. The process of remembering Lord Kṛṣṇa begins with waking up early in the morning. As Jyotiṣa Śāstra states, *rātres tu paścime yāme muhūrtau brahma ucyate*: "If the night is divided into four parts, the last part of the night is called the *brahma-muhūrta* (a part of about three hours at dawn that belongs to the Supreme Lord)." (Viṣṇu Smṛuti). The *brahma-muhūrta* (three hours prior to sunrise) is a very conducive atmosphere for doing devotional activities to please the Supreme Lord. As the Yajurveda states, *brāhma muhūrte budhyeta*, "One should get up in the *brahma-muhūrta* to devote oneself to the Supreme Lord for further spiritual improvement."

THE EIGHT RULES OF CELIBACY

*maithunaṣya parityāgo brahmacaryam tad aṣṭadhā
smaraṇam kīrtanam keli prekṣaṇam guhya bhāṣaṇam
sankalpo ḍhyavasāyaś ca kriyā nivṛttir eva ca
etad maithunam aṣṭārigam pravadanti maṇiṣināḥ*

"To be celibate, one should give up eight kinds of

amorous indulgences: remembering the opposite gender, talking with, playing with, repeatedly looking at, conversing about with others, making plans to be with, being determined to make appointments with, and engaging in physical copulation with the opposite gender; these are eight limbs of sex life explained by the learned personalities." (Vairāgya-mārtanḍa 12.144-145)

A renounced person or a celibate should not speak seductively nor should he meditate on a female whom he might have previously known, because such pondering will cause a disturbance in his mind. A Sanyāsī interested in going back to Godhead should not even smile at a woman, because females are the seeds of one's ruination, and this rule is taught by Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. Before going to sleep, one should humbly pray to the Supreme Lord to not let him have dirty dreams. All celibate students should memorize the following verse and daily repeat it before going to sleep.

RULE FOR EATING AND TAKING REST

*he kṛṣṇa karuṇāśindho dīnabandho kṛpāṁ kurū
tvāṁ maheśa mahājñātā duḥśvapnam mām na darśaya*

"O Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, O Ocean of Mercy, O Friend of the Grief-stricken, O Lord of all the Lords, O Omniscient One, please be merciful upon me and do not let me have any dirty dreams while I am asleep." (Vairāgya-mārtanḍa)

Before going to sleep, one should wash his hands and face and dry them properly. Sitting on the bed while facing either East or North, a devotee should chant the above prayer three times, and while remembering Lord Kṛṣṇa as Govinda, one should go to sleep, keeping the head toward the East, South, or West, but never North. One should always sleep with dry feet

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and dry hands. As Śrīla Vyāsadeva told Yudhiṣṭhīra:

*ārdra-pādas tu bhuñjītha na ārdra-pādas tu samviśet
ārdra-pādas tu bhuñjāno dīrgham āyur havāpnuyāt*

“One should wash one’s hands and feet and while the feet are still wet one should eat, but one should never sleep with wet feet in any circumstance. If one eats while one’s feet are still wet, one’s duration of life becomes increased.” (Mahābhārata, Śānti-parva)

REQUIREMENTS FOR A SANYĀSĪ ‘S STICK

*keśāttiko brāhmaṇaṣya dāṇḍah kāryah pramāṇataḥ
rājavāste tu sarveṣyur varṇaḥ śaumya darśaṇaḥ
anudvega-kara nṛnām satvaco 'gnī dūṣitaḥ*

“According to authoritative scriptures, the *dāṇḍa* (holy stick) should be made of straight and very thin bamboo sticks. The measurement of the holy stick (*dāṇḍa*) should be from the candidate’s toe to the top of his head in length. The *dāṇḍa* should be totally straight and erect. It should not have cut marks in different places except at the ends. It should be good looking, should not give fear to people, and should be made of unpeeled and unburnt bamboo.” (Manu Smṛuti 2.46, 47)

There are two kinds of Sanyāsīs—one is called Ekadāṇḍī (who holds one bamboo stick) who follows the Saṅkara Sampradāya (tradition of Śrīpāda Saṅkarāchārya) and the other is Tridāṇḍī (who holds four bamboo sticks tied together as one), who follows a Vaiśnava Sampradāya (one of which is the tradition of Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu). The Saṅkara Sampradāya rewards Sanyāsa initiation only to the Brāhmaṇa

born learned males whereas the Chaitanya tradition rewards Sanyāsa initiation to any learned man who becomes qualified for the order. There is no discrimination of caste, color, or creed in the Chaitanya Sampradāya. The Ekadaṇḍī Sanyāsī, at the time of taking Sanyāsa initiation, removes his sacred thread and tuft of hair from his shaved head and puts them in the river and concentrates on the impersonal Brahman, desiring to become one with Brahman, called Brahmaleen (merging into Brahman). He puts three horizontal lines on his forehead or puts no marks at all. But a Tridaṇḍī Sanyāsī keeps his sacred thread and tuft of hair on his head and humbly worships the Supreme Lord and meditates on Him in His beautiful Lord Kṛṣṇa form. The *dāṇḍa* of a *tridaṇḍī-sanyāsī* consists of four bamboo sticks tied together as one, representing his body, mind, words and his *jīva* soul. His stick represents total dedication of these four to the Supreme Lord. The Lord also is represented in his *dāṇḍa* as Supersoul, by a short piece of bamboo which is tied onto his *dāṇḍa* at the height of his ear. A Tridaṇḍī Sanyāsī (a Vaiṣṇava Sanyāsī) holds his *dāṇḍa* at least for the first twelve years and carries it everywhere he goes, and after that he may carry it or keep it in his room wherever he resides. While paying obeisance to the Lord or to the Spiritual Master, he must first touch the upper tip of his *dāṇḍa* to the floor and then pay his prostrate obeisance. The touching of the *dāṇḍa* first indicates that his body, mind, words, and his soul are totally dedicated to his Guru and to Lord Kṛṣṇa and his own obeisance indicates that all his activities are solemnly meant to please his Guru and Lord Kṛṣṇa.

A REAL SANYĀSĪ LIVES FOR OTHERS

*yatīnāṁ viṣṇu bhaktānāṁ paricaryā parāyaṇaiḥ
ikṣitā api gacchanti pāpino'pi parāṁ gatim*

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"If a Sanyāsī who is strictly engaged in devotional service to the Lord even looks at someone, even if that person is a sinner, the person achieves purification and marches towards the spiritual destination." (Viṣṇu Dharma)

The life of a real Sanyāsī is to benefit others. Such a Sanyāsī is like a wandering god on earth with a desire to uplift everyone's soul. His preaching is to bring everyone onto the spiritual platform by engaging them in chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahāmantra and helping them in performing favorable devotional service so the Supreme Lord becomes pleased. Till today, everyone in Gaudiya Vaishnavism who voluntarily accepted Sanyāsa (the renounced order of life) has aimed at spiritually benefiting the whole human society, but not being focused on living a comfortable life at the cost of others. A devotee should not live at the cost of others' expense, but rather should live on whatever is supplied by providence from preaching spirituality to guide others to the spiritual platform.

REQUIREMENTS OF A SANYĀSĪ

*trai-vargikāṁs tyajet sarvān ārambhān avanīpate
mitrādiśu śamo maitrāś śamas teṣv eva jantuṣu*

"A Sanyāsī should not have any interest whatsoever in religiosity, economic development, and sense gratification. He should be honestly equipoised towards and treat his enemies and friends alike and should be friendly to every living entity." (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3.9.26)

A Sanyāsī should travel from place to place and engage in preaching the science of God. Bringing people to serve Lord Kṛṣṇa should be the goal of a Sanyāsī. He should be free from lust, anger, greed, pride, illusion, and material hankering. He

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should present spiritual truth with logic and reason. His body, mind, and words should be totally engaged in the service of his Guru and Lord Kṛṣṇa. With this mood, he makes further spiritual advancement.

*na Śiśyān anubadhnīta granthān naivabhyased bahūn
na vyākhyām upayañjīta nārambhān ārabhet kvacit*

"A Sannyāsī must not present allurements of material benefits to attract disciples. He should not read books that are not spiritual, nor should he give discourses as a means of earning his livelihood. He must never attempt to increase his material opulence unnecessarily." (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 7.13.8)

DUTIES AND MANNERS OF A DEVOTEE

*naiva dvau na trayah kārya na mṛṣyeraṇ parasparam
ekārthe hy eva bhūtānām bhedo bhavati sarvadā*

"A devotee should assign one person for doing one type of work. If two or three people are assigned to do the same work, because each other's ways of doing the work may differ and thus they will not be able to tolerate each other's behavior, they may not successfully finish the work. Therefore, due to difference of opinion among more than one person engaged in doing one act of work, engaging more than one person in the same act of work is forbidden." (Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva 80.25)

*asamī-tyāgāt pāpaṛtam apāpāṁs
tulyo daṇḍāḥ sprśate miśra-bhāvāt
śuṣkeñārdrām dahyate miśra-bhāvān
na miśraḥ syāt pāpa-kṛdbhīḥ kathañcit*

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“Any person who is pious and wants to remain fully pure should abandon the association of those who are involved in accumulating offenses or sins, because by keeping their association and company, a pious person also becomes punished along with the sinners due to being thought to be involved in conspiracy. Just as a blazing fire of dry wood also burns the wet wood, similarly, even though innocent, a pious person is also punished. Therefore, it is wise for an intelligent person to give up connection with those who are involved in breach of trust and sinning.” (Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva 73.23)

*aśraddhā paramāṁ pāpam śraddhā pāpa-vimocanī
jahātī pāpam śraddhāvān sarpo jīrnām iva tvacam*

“Those who follow the spiritual process but don’t have much faith in it, such people become implicated with grievous sin whereas those who follow the spiritual process with full faith become relieved from their sins in a similar way as a snake relinquishes its slough.” (Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva 264.15)

*na phalādarśanād dharmāḥ sankitavyo na devatāḥ
yastavyam ca prayatnena dātavyam cānasūyatā*

“While following the spiritual process if success (result) is not realized immediately, one should not suspect the authenticity of the spiritual process nor should blame the divine authority for it. The proper rule to receive success in spirituality is that, without finding any faults in anything, one should faithfully continue following the process and also give charity to a person who is authorized to receive it. Then, success will surely come.” (Mahābhārat, Vana-parva 31.38)

*līlāyālparāṁ yathā gātrāt pramījyāt tu rajaḥ pumān
bahu-yatnena ca mahat-pāpa nirharaṇām tv acalam tathā*

"Just as one easily shakes off a little bit of dirt seen on the body but being very dirty due to an excess of dirt takes more time to clean it off, similarly, a little sin becomes wiped off with little spiritual endeavor but wiping off a lot of sin takes much more time and seriousness in spirituality." (Mahābhārat, Śānti-parva 309.17)

*kalav adharmo bhūyiṣṭham dharma bhavati na kvacit
sarveṣām eva varṇānāṁ sva-dharmāc cyavate manah
śūdra bhaikṣeṇa jīvanti brāhmaṇaḥ paricaryayā
yoga-kṣemasya nāśaś ca vartate varṇaśāṅkaraḥ*

"In Kaliyuga, people perform a lot of sins, and hardly anyone performs spiritual deeds. In this way, practically everyone thinks in their mind that they do not need to perform any prescribed duties. In this situation many low-born people will wear devotional garb and will look like saintly people and thus live imitating a devotional life on donations. The Brāhmaṇas will work for a salary for their maintenance. In this way, the welfare of everyone will be jeopardized because what people will remain will be either of mixed descent from intermarriage or be flat-out illegitimate." (Mahābhārat Śānti-parva 69.92, 93)

Thus ends the Eighth Chapter of the Vrajavāsī Realization.

THE ŚRĪMAD BHĀGAVATAM



गलित् वैष्णवशास्त्राणि ये पठन्ति गृहे नराः ।
सर्वक्लेश विनिर्मुक्ताः भवन्ति सर्ववन्दिताः ॥६॥

*galit-vaiṣṇava śāstrāṇi ye paṭhanti gṛhe narāḥ
sarva kleśa vinirmuktāḥ tu bhavanti sarva vanditāḥ*

Those who study matured Vaiṣṇava scriptures like the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and many other such scriptures in their homes become free from all kinds of problems and become praiseworthy to all.

THE ŚRĪMAD BHĀGAVATAM IS EVER-FRESH

One may think that the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam existed for a long period and that is why its knowledge is irrelevant to today's modern society. Even though it is an ancient scripture, it gives modern solutions as well because it addresses the eternal problems of birth, old age, disease, death, illusion, envy, mental tensions, and many other such unsolvable problems of life. It perfectly educates everyone about how to eradicate these unsolvable problems of life and go to the spiritual world to enjoy eternal bliss. Becoming eternally blissful and sporting with God in His spiritual world is better than experiencing anxieties along with the ups and downs of this world. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is

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the only scripture that solves this problem. Due to this reason, the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is recognized to be the only ripened fruit of the Vedic desire tree and it is meant for all people and for all time. That is why it is accepted to be transcendental among all the spiritual literatures, always remains fresh, and never becomes old.

GLORIFICATION OF THE DELIVERERS OF THE ŚRĪMAD BHĀGAVATAM

*idam bhāgavatam nāma purāṇam brahma-sammitam
uttama-śloka-caritam cakāra bhagavān ṣeṣiḥ*

Śrī Śūta Goswāmī said, “Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is the book incarnation of God in this age of Kaliyuga; it is compiled by the great sage, Śrīla Vyāsadeva, the incarnation of God Himself; and it includes transcendental pastimes of the Supreme Lord, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa.” (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam)

What Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is is explained in the Garuḍa Purāṇa thus:

*artho'yaṁ brahma-sūtrāṇāṁ bhāratārtha vinirṇayaḥ
gāyatri-bhāṣya rūpao'sau vedārtha paribr̄hīhitāḥ*

“Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is the commentary of the Vedānta Sūtra; it is the complete purport of the Mahābhārat; it is the explanation of the Gāyatri Mantra; and it is the topmost explanation of all the Vedas.”

*ānanda tīrtha nāma sukhamaya dhāma yati jīyat
samsārārṇava tarāṇīḥ yamīha janāḥ kīrtanyānīti budhāḥ*

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“The wise glorify Ānanda Tīrtha Madhva, who later became known as Śrīpāda Madhvāchārya. He gave happiness to everyone by delivering the knowledge of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam through giving his commentary on it, which acts like a boat to help every sincere person to go across this ocean of material existence.” (Prameya-ratnāvalī)

*śrīdhara-svāmī-prasāde 'bhāgavata' jāni
jagad-guru śrīdhara-svāmī 'guru' kari māni*

“Later, Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī gave his commentary on the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, which is why he is considered to be the Spiritual Master of the entire world, because by his mercy only the studious (like me) are able to understand the inner meaning of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. I therefore accept him as a Spiritual Master.” (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Antya 7.133)

LORD KRŚNA APPEARS AS THE ŚRIMAD BHĀGAVATAM

*pādau yadīyau prathama dvitīyau
tṛtīya pūryau kathitau yadi dṛk
nābhīstathā pañcama eva ṣaṣṭhau
bhujantarāmā dauryugalam tāthānyau
kaṇṭhastu rājan navamo yadīyo
mukhāravindam daśamah praphullam
ekādaśau yaṣya lalāṭa pattam
śiro'pi tu dvādaśa eva bhāti
tamādidevarām karuṇā-nidhānam
tamāla varṇam suhitāvatāram
apāra sansāra samudra setum
bhajāmahe bhāgavata svarūpa*

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"I pay my obeisances to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who has appeared in the form of the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam book, who is the original personality, who is the ocean of mercy, who is dark-complexioned like a *tamāla* tree, who is all auspicious, who is the most pure, who is the source of all incarnations, and who acts as a bridge to cross the unpalatable ocean-like material existence. Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is the literary incarnation of God. It has twelve limbs in the form of twelve cantos. Of these, the First and Second Cantos are the replica of the lotus feet of the Lord; the Third and Fourth Cantos represent His thighs; the Fifth Canto acts as His navel; the Sixth Canto represents His chest; the Seventh and Eighth Cantos are likened to His two arms; the Ninth Canto is likened to His neck; the Tenth Canto represents His smiling face; the Eleventh Canto is likened to His forehead; and the Twelfth Canto is likened to His head." (Padma Purāṇa)

*muinī mora bhakta āra grantha bhāgavata
yāra bheda āche tāra nāśa bhala mate*

Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "Anyone who makes a distinction between Me, My devotee, and My book representation, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, will surely be destroyed one day." (Chaitanya Bhāgavata, Madhya 21.18)

*sabe puruṣārtha bhakti bhāgavate haya
prema rūpa bhāgavata cārivede kaya
cārī veda dadhi bhāgavata navanīta
mathilen śuka khāilen parīkṣita*

"All the details of performing Bhakti are mentioned in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. It explains about how to attain love of Godhead. For this reason, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is the practical form of love of Godhead. The four Vedas are compared to

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yogurt, and the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is butter inside the yogurt which is obtained by churning that yogurt. Śrī Śukadeva Goswāmī churned the yogurt-like Vedas and brought out the butter-like Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, and Parīkṣit Mahārāja ate that butter.” (Chaitanya Bhāgavata, Madhya 21.15, 16)

*kṛṣṇa-tulya bhāgavata-vibhu, sarvāśraya
prati-śloke prati-akṣare nānā artha kaya*

“Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is as great as Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Lord Himself, the shelter of everything. In every verse of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, and in every syllable, the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam explains various ways to attain love of Godhead.” (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Madhya 24.318)

*mahācintya bhāgavata sarva śāstre gāya
ihāna bujhiye vidyā tapa pratiṣṭhāya*

“All the Vedic scriptures declare that the language of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is very difficult to understand, especially for those who are egotistic due to material education, their austerities, and worldly prestige.” (Chaitanya Bhāgavata, Madhya 21.23)

One should daily read Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, worship Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, discuss Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, or donate it to a qualified and pure Brāhmaṇa Vaiṣṇava so as to attain the result of personally touching the Supreme Lord. Studying Śrīmad Bhāgavatam as a daily routine is very important because, by this, Lord Kṛṣṇa dances on one’s tongue.

*ślokārdham śloka pādām vā nityam bhāgavata udbhavaṁ
paṭhasva sva mukhenā 'pi yadi icchasi bhavākṣayam*

“Anyone who reads Śrīmad Bhāgavatam as a daily

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routine—just half a verse, or even a quarter (one line) of a verse—can sever their tie to this material world and stop facing problems in life by definitely attaining liberation.” (Padma Purāṇa, Uttarākhaṇḍa 195.36)

THE TWO KINDS OF BHĀGAVATAS

*dui sthāne bhāgavata nāma suni mātra
grantha bhāgavata āra kṛṣṇa-kṛpā-pātra*

“I have heard from the Vedic authorities that there are only two kinds of *bhāgavatas* (pure items). One is in the form of a book by the name Śrīmad Bhāgavatam and the other is the pure devotee to whom the Lord has invested His divine mercy.” (Chaitanya Bhāgavata, Antya 3.532)

*eka bhāgavata baḍa-bhāgavata-śāstra
āra bhāgavata-bhakta bhakti-rasa-pātra*

“One of these two *bhāgavatas* is the great scripture Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, and the other is the pure devotee, who is absorbed in the mellow of loving devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa.” (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Ādi 1.99)

For this reason Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu recommended that it is imperative that a sincere person should learn Śrīmad Bhāgavatam from the person Bhāgavatam (a pure devotee) whose very life is Śrīmad Bhāgavatam in practice.”

*bhāgavata bujhi hena yāra āche jñāna
se nā jāne kabhu bhāgavatera pramāṇa*

“If one thinks that the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is just a

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normal book, that person will never understand its inner meaning in truth." (Chaitanya Bhāgavata, Madhya 21.24)

VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF SCRIPTURES

*rātrām ca jñāna vacanām jñānam pañca vidham smṛtam
tenedam pañca rātrām ca pravadanti maniṣināḥ*

"The word *rātra* from the book Pañcharātra stands for 'knowledge' and *pañcha* stands for 'five categories.' [These categories are *vaiśaik* (about purity), *yogik* (mystical), *janma-mṛtyu* (about the cycle of birth to death), *muktipada* (about liberation), and *kṛṣṇa bhakti rasa prema jñāna* (knowledge of loving devotional service)] and it was spoken by sage Nārada. That is why the learned personalities have named this literature Nārada Pañcharātra." (Nārada Pañcharātra 1.1.44)

*sātvikeṣu ca kalpeṣu māhātmyam adhikām hareḥ
rājaśeṣu ca māhātmyam adhikām brahmaṇo viduḥ
śakteragneś ca māhātmyam tāmaśeṣu Śivaṣya ca
saṅkīrṇeṣu sarasvatyāḥ pitṛṇāṁca nigadyate*

"The *sāttvic* Purāṇas (in goodness) mostly narrate about the transcendental pastimes of the Supreme Lord Śrī Harī. The *rājasic* Purāṇas (in passion) mostly talk about Lord Brahmā's activities, and the *tāmasic* Purāṇas (in ignorance) mention about the glories of Lord Śiva, Agnī, and the goddess Durgā. The mixed Purāṇas (for those in the mixed modes of goodness, passion, and ignorance) explain different forms of demigods and goddesses, such as Sarasvatī. Some descriptions about the forefathers are also found in them." (Tatva-sandarbha 17)

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*vaiśnavam nāradīyam ca tathā bhāgavatam śubham
garuḍaś ca tathā padmam varāham śubhadāsane
sātvikāni purāṇāni vijñāyāni maniṣibhiḥ
brahmāṇḍam brahma vaivartam mārkaṇḍeya tathaiva ca
bhaviṣyam vāmanam brahma rājasāni nibodhata
matsyam kaurmyam yathā liṅgam sivam skandam tathaiva ca
āgneyam ca ṣaḍetāni tāmsāni nibodhata*

“The Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Nāradīya Purāṇa, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Garuḍa Purāṇa, Padma Purāṇa, and Varāha Purāṇa are said to be auspicious and are meant for people in the mode of goodness according to the learned. The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa, Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, Vāmana Purāṇa, and Brahma Purāṇa are used by people in the mode of passion. The Matsya Purāṇa, Kūrma Purāṇa, Liṅga Purāṇa, Śiva Purāṇa, Skanda Purāṇa, and Agnī Purāṇa are meant for people in the mode of ignorance.” (Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa)

*gacchanti vaiśnave bhaktyā śāstram bhāgavatam hi ye
kalpa koti sahaśrāṇi viṣṇu-loke vaśanti te*

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said to Arjuna, “Any person who, with devotion, donates a book of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam to a real Vaiṣṇava remains eternally in My abode.” (Skanda Purāṇa)

Anyone who gives the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam book as a gift to a real devotee on a full moon day attains the highest perfection of life by returning to the spiritual world.

*cāri-veda-upaniṣade yata kichu haya
tāra artha lanā vyāsa karilā sañcaya*

“Śrīla Vyāsadeva collected whatever Vedic conclusions

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were available in the four Vedas and in all the Upaniṣads and placed them in the codes of the Vedānta Sūtra." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Madhya 25.98)

The Vedānta Sūtra is explained by Śrīla Vyāsadeva himself in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, which is the commentary on the Vedānta Sūtra. That is why the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is called the *Vedānta-bhāṣya* (by the help of which the original meaning of the Vedānta Sūtra is understood by a layman). Systematically educating the people in the teachings of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam will clear up the hazy atmosphere from their intellect and thus they will be able to see the real purpose of human life. Therefore, the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is said to be the cream of all Vedic literatures, which also include the systematic histories of the entire universe.

The Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam also explains the true knowledge about one's own self, and by hearing it one can become free from material contaminations and enter into the kingdom of fearlessness.

*ata eva bhāgavata-sūtrera 'artha-rūpa
nija-kṛta sūtrera nija-bhāṣya-svarūpa*

"Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam gives the actual meaning of the Vedānta Sūtra. The author of the Vedānta Sūtra is Vyāsadeva, and he himself has explained the codes of the Vedānta Sūtra in the form of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Madhya 25.142)

TRANSCENDENTAL INSTRUCTION

*brahmā devānāṁ prathamaḥ sambabhuva
viśvasya kartā bhuvanasya goptā*

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*sa brahma-vidyāṁ sarva vidyā pratiṣṭhāṁ
atharvāya jyeṣṭha-putrāya prāha*

"Lord Brahmā, the engineer of this universe, caretaker of the planetary systems, and first demigod, was first born from the Supreme Lord, created this universe and then produced everyone. Then he taught this science of transcendental knowledge to his own first son, Atharvā, and told him that it is the basis of all knowledge and thus made him the authority of it." (Mundāka Upaniṣad 1.1.1)

The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam will award one with the ultimate knowledge if one studies it with a humble attitude and respect. Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is a desire tree that fulfills the ultimate desire of its worshiper and reader. Nārada Muni brought this Bhāgavatam from the spiritual world and delivered it to his disciple, Śrīla Vyāsadeva, who then spoke it to Śukadeva Goswāmī, and he later spoke it to King Parīkṣit in the assembly of sages where Śrī Sūta Goswāmī was present, who later spoke it in Naimiṣāraṇya forest, India. In this way, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam was gradually handed down in the chain of disciplic succession until the present day in its unchanged version. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is full of transcendental nectar, just like a ripened fruit that has been touched by the beak of a parrot becomes very sweet. As it is said, *raso vai saḥ rasam hy eva lavdhvā ānandi bhavati*: "The transcendental message of the Lord is compared with the ocean of nectar. Anybody who drinks this nectar becomes unlimitedly happy and blissful." (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7.9)

*bhāgavata tulasi gaṅgāyā bhaktajane
caturdhā vigraha kṛṣṇa cāri sane*

"Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Tulasī plant, the Ganges, and the pure devotee of the Lord (the true Vaiṣṇava) are the four forms

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of Lord Kṛṣṇa existing in this world for everyone's benefit." (Chaitanya Bhāgavata, Madhya 21.81)

The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is the direct explanatory form of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa (also named as Adhokṣaja, meaning, the infallible Personality of Godhead) who is beyond all material sense perception. The surest remedy to cut the tie to miseries of birth and death of this world is to become accustomed to hearing the transcendental pastimes of the Supreme Lord which are systematically stated in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. What the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is and what it consists of is stated in the following way:

*grantho 'ṣṭādaśa sāhaśro dvādaśa skandha samyutaḥ
parīkṣit śuka sambādaḥ śrīmad bhāgavatādhidaḥ*

"The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam includes eighteen thousand verses, it is divided into twelve cantos, and it is the conversation between Parīkṣit Mahārāja and Śrī Śukadeva Gosvāmī. Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is so potent that if someone carefully studies it daily, they sever their tie to this material world." (Padma Purāṇa, Uttarākhaṇḍa 195.29)

*aham vedmi śuko vetti vyāso vetti na vetti vā
bhaktyā bhāgavataṁ grāhyām na buddhyā na ca tīkayā*

Lord Śiva said, "I know Śrīmad Bhāgavatam; Śukadeva Gosvāmī, the son of Vyāsadeva, knows Śrīmad Bhāgavatam; but Vyāsadeva may know or may not know the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, of that I am not so sure. On the whole, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is the spotless Purāṇa, and it can be learned only through devotional service, not just by one's material intelligence, academic qualification, by speculative methods, or through following one's imaginary commentaries." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Madhya 24.313)

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*yāhā, bhāgavata pāda vaisṇavera sthāne
ekānta āśraya kara caitanya-caraṇe*

“If you want to understand Śrīmad Bhāgavatam,’ Śrīla Svarūpa Dāmodara said, ‘you should humbly approach a self-realized pure Vaiṣṇava who is well versed in scriptural knowledge and listen from him submissively. You can do this when you have completely taken shelter at the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu.’” (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Antya 5.131)

*śāstram pāpa haram puṇyam pavitram bhoga mokṣadam
śāntidañca mahārthañ ca vakti yaḥ sa jagad guroḥ*

Śāṇḍilya Muni says to the sages, “Reading Vaiṣṇava scriptures remove one’s sins and make one meritorious and pure. They transmit sufficient peace and happiness in this world, create Vaiṣṇava etiquette within one, and reward one with liberation. The devotee who speaks this in truth is the Spiritual Master of the whole world.” (Nārada Pañcharātra)

If a person in this material world desires to act piously to achieve economic development, to have sense gratification, and at last seeks liberation, that person should always worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead and listen to narrations about Him. Although the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam firmly stands on the principle of *pañchama-puruṣārtha* (the ultimate goal of the soul, devotional service) still even a materialistic person can fulfill these desires by studying it. Those who listen to the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam may ask questions of the speaker in order to clarify the full meaning, but this should not be done in a challenging spirit. Furthermore, one should not sit on a *vyāsāsana* (elevated seat) to give lectures on the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam unless he is fully conversant in all systems of spiritual philosophy, able to present complete theistic views of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam in

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defiance of all other systems and also able to answer the questions presented to him after the lecture.

*Śrīmad bhāgavatam bhaktyā paṭhate viṣṇu sannidhau
jāgare tat padam yāti kula-vṛnda samanvitam*

Lord Brahmā says to Nārada Muni, “One who studies the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam with full devotion in front of the Deity of Lord Kṛṣṇa and carefully follows what it dictates will surely go to the spiritual world along with their ancestors.” (Prahlāda Saṁhitā)

By studying Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, one becomes purified far more quickly than by visiting holy places of pilgrimage, performing sacrifices, giving charity, or participating in various ritualistic ceremonies. One who regularly hears the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is blessed by the Supreme Lord to quickly go back to Godhead, whereas others have to wait much longer.

*Ślokam bhāgavatam vā pi ślokārdham padam eva vā
likhitam tiṣṭhate yasya grhe tasya sadā harīḥ
vaśate nātra sandeho deva devo janārdanah*

Sage Gautama says to Ambarīṣa Mahārāja, “Even if one verse of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam—even half of a verse or even one fourth of a verse—is available in anyone’s house, the Lord of all the Lords, Lord Janārdana (caretaker of all, Lord Kṛṣṇa) remains in that person’s house for all time. In this, there is no doubt.” (Padma Purāṇa)

If anyone wants to be delivered from this material existence, one should daily study and/or hear the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. Simply by regularly and submissively listening to it, the feeling for loving devotion to Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa will arise within the heart and will extinguish the fire of one’s conditional life of repeated birth and death. But one must hear it or study it

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cautiously and systematically; page-by-page; step-by-step; and chapter-by-chapter and not jump from one part to another like reading an ordinary material book. Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is the natural commentary on the Vedānta Sūtra and is the conclusion of the Mahābhārat. Therefore, if the masses, the intelligentsia and the leaders of the modern world take up the study of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, then all the poverty, illusion, hankering, lamentation, suffering, lawlessness, and fearfulness of society will come to an end and peace will immediately prevail in the world. One may wonder how to study Śrīmad Bhāgavatam and where to go to study it. In answer to this, Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu told Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa: *vaiśṇava pāśa bhāgavata kara adhyayana*, "Go to and try to study the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam from a pure Vaiśṇava who is expert in Vedic knowledge and has realized God." (Chaitanya Charitāmṛta, Antya 13.113)

*nityam kṛṣṇa kathā yaśa prāṇād api garīyasi
na tasya durlabham kiñcid iha loke paratra ca*

"Anyone who has realized that there is nothing more important than daily hearing the narrations about the Supreme Personality of Godhead and feels that it is more important than their breathing, for that person there is nothing unattainable in this world or in the next, after death." (Dvārakā-māhātmya)

The conditioned soul cannot revive their dormant Kṛṣṇa consciousness just by their own efforts. One requires the help of a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master. The Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, by His causeless mercy, appears in the human form as a pure devotee and guides the person towards obtaining liberation. Lord Kṛṣṇa also appears in His literary incarnation as Śrīla Vyāsadeva and compiles the Vedic literatures so the living entity can obtain sufficient spiritual knowledge. Therefore, Lord Kṛṣṇa is called the matchlessly merciful God. He is so merciful towards the living entity that nothing more can be said about

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this. By studying these literatures, one's attachment to sense gratification becomes uprooted and one achieves happiness of mind, and develops detachment from material hankering and thus proceeds towards liberation.

*ye śrīvanti kathāṁ viṣṇor ye paṭhanti hareḥ kathāṁ
kālāyutāṁ na avalokyāṁ me gatās te brāhma śāsvatam*

Lord Yamarāja said, "O messengers, if anyone hears or speaks about the transcendental narrations of Lord Śrī Viṣṇu (a name of Lord Kṛṣṇa), do not look at them nor towards their ancestors. You must understand that such devoted people cannot be seen by me even after millions of millenniums because such a person already has marched towards attaining the spiritual world." (Skanda Purāṇa)

If one hears this transcendental literature, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, with full awe and reverence from a pure devotee, it surely re-awakens one's Kṛṣṇa consciousness within the heart. The nectar emanating from the lips of a pure devotee enters through the ears of the listener and satisfies the heart completely. Even if one's heart is fully dirty due to unlimited sins, or if one feels that sense gratification is the goal of human life, still, one will develop attachment to the lotus feet of the Lord simply by sincerely listening to Śrīmad Bhāgavatam from a pure devotee. Submissively hearing the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam from a pure devotee is the key. Therefore, one should carefully search for and find a pure devotee, not a professional reciter, to submit to listening to Śrīmad Bhāgavatam.

IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING ŚRIMAD BHĀGAVATAM AT HOME

na yasya tiṣṭhate gehe śāstraṁ bhāgavataṁ kalau

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na tasya punarāvṛttir yāmyāt pāśāt kadācana

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said to Arjuna, "In Kaliyuga, if someone does not have Śrīmad Bhāgavatam in their house, then that person can never become free from the clutches of Yamarāja." (Skanda Purāṇa)

Lord Brahmā told Nārada that at any place Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is available, Lord Śrī Harī goes there accompanied by all the demigods. Therefore, it is a great fortune to have Śrīmad Bhāgavatam in one's home, because when Lord Hari comes, He is followed by His chaste wife, Lakṣmīdevī (the Goddess of Fortune). Thus, poverty runs away from that house. Therefore, everyone should have this literature in their home, and since we have made it our duty to distribute Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, it is available from the addresses listed in the front of this book.

RESULTS OF OFFENDING THE ŚRĪMAD BHĀGAVATAM

*yo hi bhāgavate śāstre vighnam ācarate pumān
nābhinandati duṣṭātmā kulānām pātayet śatam*

Sage Mārkaṇḍeya said to King Bhagiratha, "Anyone who creates any kind of disturbance where speaking or reading of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is going on and does not glorify or pay heartfelt respects to it—such a rascal descends to the lowest planets accompanied by their previous one hundred ancestors." (Skanda Purāṇa)

*bhāgavata ye nāmāne se yavana sama
tāra śatru āche janme janme prabhu yama*

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"If one does not accept the authority of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam and does not honor its contents wholeheartedly then that person is thought to be a Yavana (faithless) and Lord Yamarāja remains their enemy birth after birth." (Chaitanya Bhāgavata, Ādi 1.39)

*durvedā vā suvedā vā prakṛtāḥ saṁskṛtāḥ tathā
brāhmaṇā nāvamantavyā bhasma-channā ivāgnayaḥ*

"It does not matter how the traditional Brahmanas are, they are not to be insulted in any way. Either they are learned in the Vedic science or are not learned at all, either they are purified by passing through the purificatory thread giving ceremony or are not purified at all, they should be respected but insulted because their spiritual potency is like the fire buried and kept hidden inside the ashes." (Mahābhārat, Vana-parva 200.88)

*ālokya sarva śāstrāṇi bhāṣyāṇi cāsyā punaḥ punaḥ
yāvat sāra samudhṛtya tad atra pratipāditam*

"After researching throughout the Vedic scriptures and studying commentaries of the greatly honored *āchāryas*, and having meditated on the essence of those materials again and again, we have presented in this literature, *Vaiṣṇava kāṇṭha-hāra*, whatever we could realize with our humble intelligence to be favorable and fit for the spiritual advancement as the Guidebook for the Spiritually Inclined, which we have presented here in this book for the everyone." Jai Śrī Rādhe.

Thus ends the Ninth Chapter of the Vrajavāsi Realization.

Śrī kṛṣṇārpanam astu

Appendices

About Swamiji

His Divine Grace Mahāmañdaleshwar Mahant Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarām Swāmījī appeared in a dynasty of Śrotriya Brāhmaṇa Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. His family dynasty descends directly from and dates back to Kaśyapa Muni, one of the seven sons born from the mind of the first created being in the universe, Lord Brahmā.

Swāmījī was exposed to Bhaktiyoga (the path of devotion) since birth. His father, a highly respected Brāhmaṇa and Guru of many in the Vrindaban area, began tutoring his son at the tender age of four, at their home in Vrindaban. At the age of eight, Swāmījī was enrolled in Vrindaban's renowned Nimbarka Sanskrit Mahāvidyālaya College, where he lived in the dorm and studied continually for eight years. A brilliant student, he then was transferred to an English college, where he learned to translate the ancient Vedic scriptures into English.

Swāmījī left his parents' humble concrete home in Vrindaban to take shelter of his Spiritual Master, Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda. When he joined Prabhupāda, there were only three thatched huts in ISKCON Vrindaban at his Guru's place. When Prabhupāda came to Vrindaban, Swāmījī requested to be his disciple. When Śrīla Prabhupāda found out that Swāmījī is a Vrajavāsi, Śrīla Prabhupāda said that Swāmījī is already a Guru, therefore he does not need any initiation. According to Vedic scriptures Vrajavāsīs are Guru to everyone. Swāmījī again requested initiation one year later, but Prabhupāda told him the same thing. On many occasions Śrīla Prabhupāda said that he was already a Guru and did not need any spiritual initiation. Finally, Swāmījī said that without initiation, nobody can receive liberation, so he was called by Prabhupāda into his room at about five in the evening and accepted our Swāmījī as his disciple. Swāmījī is Prabhupāda's only disciple for whom Śrīla Prabhupāda chanted three full rounds of the Mahāmantra on the disciple's own used beads; which he handed back to Swāmījī. Śrīla Prabhupāda chanted on only three seeds on a new set of beads for every other disciple in ISKCON and gave them those new beads.

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Prabhupāda told Swāmījī that he was serving Kṛṣṇa Balarām so nicely, and therefore his name is Kṛṣṇa Balarām Dās, and told Swāmījī how much he loves Kṛṣṇa Balarām.

In regard to his Guru's movement, our Swāmījī himself said, "I did not join ISKCON thinking that it had big buildings with many Western disciples so I could enjoy their company, but I joined because I understood that Śrīla Prabhupāda was a real devotee and I wanted to help in his mission. I joined to remain truly Kṛṣṇa conscious. I did not join to obtain worship, respect, honor, position, or donations for myself. But I joined my Guru, Śrīla Prabhupāda, knowing that he had wanted everything from the Vedic scriptures to be presented As It Is, and that included its etiquette." Due to the ISKCON leaders' deviation from the authentic Vedic standard (consult Swāmījī's *My Mission* series for details), Swāmījī officially resigned from ISKCON in 1989. To this day, he is the only disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda who wrote an official resignation letter to resign from ISKCON as a member and the letter was accepted and published in the publication *ISKCON minutes*. Swāmījī carried on serving his Guru, and realized through the intense feelings in his heart that his Guru had passed on the torch of disciplic succession to him. Thus, he founded the organization Bhāgavat Dharmā Samāj in 1990.

Swāmījī wrote *Haricharyā Dīpikā*, An Illustration of Devotional Service (printed in 1990) book, in Sanskrit Devanāgarī, which revealed Swāmījī's strong command of the Sanskrit language and realizations of the path of devotion. This caught the attention of all the Mahants and Śrī Mahants of the four Vaiṣṇava Sampradāyas authorized by the Vedic scriptures. In October of 1991, Swāmījī was unanimously appointed to the position of Mahant by all the Mahants of the four Vaiṣṇava Sampradāyas. Śrīla Prabhupāda had desired this position of Mahant in 1975, which was unfulfilled at that time, but now his will has been fulfilled by our Swāmījī. In April of 2004, the four Vaiṣṇava Sampradāyas elevated Swāmījī to the position of Mahāmaṇḍaleśwar, choosing to bypass the position of Mahant

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altogether. Historically Mahāmaṇḍaleshwar is the highest position (equal to cardinal) that has been held among the Mahants of the four Vaiṣṇava Sampradāyas of all of India. At the Kumbha Melā in 2012, all the Śrī Mahants wanted to select Swāmījī for the topmost position of Jagad Guru. Swāmījī has yet to accept that honor.

Swāmījī has written Ekādaśī, the Day of Lord Hari (printed in 1986) book, he wrote the Vaiṣṇava Kanṭha-Hāra, The Guidebook for the Spiritually Inclined or A Necklace of the Surrendered Souls (printed in 1989-2018), and has given the Vrajavāsī Commentaries on many Vedic scriptures, including the Bhagavad Gītā (printed in 1991 and in 2017), and the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (printed in fifteen volumes, one-by-one starting from 1991 till 2013 and then printed as a set in 2016). Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is the sweet cream of the Vedic scriptures and the literary incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. Swāmījī is also the first Guru to write translations and commentary on the Vedānta Sūtra in over two hundred years, which nobody else has completed due to the level of understanding of Sanskrit required to translate the aphorisms and give commentary upon. He is also the first Guru ever to have written commentary in three different languages (Sanskrit Devanāgarī, Hindi, and English) on the Vedānta Sūtra (printed in 2016). Swāmījī has written the Guru Nirṇaya Dīpikā, or the Scriptural Decision on Who Can Become Guru and Who Cannot (printed in 1993), which reveals the Vedic injunctions on the qualifications of Guru without diluting anything. His Guru Nirṇaya Dīpikā is substantiated with evidence from over ninety Vedic scriptures and authorities, including direct disciples of Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, such as Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī and Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī. Swāmījī has written many other smaller books periodically, including the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (printed in 2005). Swamiji has spoken complete twelve Cantos of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam in seven days and these seven lectures of Swamiji has been assimilated as a book named as How to Pass Your Best Seven Days on Earth (printed in 2010). A Vedic

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Vegetarian named Healthy and Wise Choice along with many Vedic recipes (printed in 1993). Bhakti Bhajan Mālā, A Necklace of Devotional Songs (printed in 205). There several Hindi books published as well and many books have been translated into several Indian and western languages.

Out of all the disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda, our Swāmijī is the only disciple born, raised, and educated in Śrī Vrindāban Dhāma, the Vraja Land. This land of Vraja is the only place on earth that has descended directly from the spiritual world, Vaikuṇṭha. The Śrī Vrindāban Dhāma on earth is equal to the topmost planet of the spiritual world, Goloka, and has descended upon earth for Lord Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Viśvanātha Chakravarti Ṭhākura, a recognized authority on Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism, says that if you want to learn spiritual life properly and perfectly, you should go to Vrindāban and learn it from the Vrajavāsīs. Because Vrindāban is Lord Kṛṣṇa's home, those born and raised there are not ordinary people. Swāmijī, being born and raised in Vrindāban, is a Vrajavāsī and therefore is a permanent resident of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa's own personal abode. The Vrajavāsīs do not need to take to the Sanyāsa order of life because they are already self-realized. However, Swāmijī is the first Vrajavāsī to ever wear saffron and take to the Sanyāsa order. One of Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu's favorite disciples, Śrīla Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī, describes the value of the Vrajavāsīs in the following way in his Śrī Vrindāban Mahimāmṛtam:

*varṇānāṁ brāhmaṇo gurūḥ brāhmaṇānāṁ gurū sanyāsī
sanyāsīnāṁ gurūḥ avināśī avināśīnāṁ gurūḥ vrajavāsī*

“The Brāhmaṇa is the Guru of the four social orders (Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra), the Sanyāsī is the Guru of the Brāhmaṇas, the imperishable God is the Guru of the Sanyāsīs, and the Vrajavāsī is the Guru of that imperishable God.”

Swāmijī is a Śrotriya Brāhmaṇa Vaiṣṇava devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa and is authorized to function as Guru by all the ancient

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Vedic scriptures of India written in Sanskrit, and his position is exalted even among the Vrajavāsīs and the Vaiṣṇava Mahants, who are all real devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Thus, it is impossible for anyone to be held in higher regard among the true self-realized devotees of the Lord than Swāmījī is today. We are truly blessed by God to have such a Swāmījī as our Guru. We must all take full advantage of his knowledge of the Vedic scriptures. Swāmījī can bring true peace to our troubled world.

The Publishers

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GLOSSARY

A

Āchamana—a ceremonial rite for purification in which one sips a little water while simultaneously chanting the names of the Supreme Lord.

Āchāra—etiquette and codes of conduct to be followed by a Vaiṣṇava.

Āchārya—a Spiritual Master who teaches by his own example.

Acyuta—the infallible Personality of Godhead.

Adhikārī—a spiritual position (title) given to a householder.

Adhokṣaja—the imperishable Personality of Godhead.

Agastya—A great sage who authored many Vedic hymns and also has written on Ayurvedic medicine. The son of Mitra and Varuṇa, he was appeared from a water jar. Once he swallowed the oceans and also forced the Vindhya mountain to bend itself down before him.

Ahilyā—the daughter of Lord Brahmā, the wife of the great sage Gautama, and one of the five most chaste ladies of this world—Ahilyā, Draupadī, Sītā, Pārvatī, and Mandodarī.

Anusūyā—the wife of Sage Atri who performed austerities with her husband and achieved the benediction to have Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva appear united as their son, Dattātreya.

Aparādha—an offense, especially against either the Supreme Lord, His holy name, or His true devotees.

Archana—Deity worship, one of many varieties of devotional service.

Āśrama—the home of the Spiritual Master, or a residence utilized for spiritual purposes by Brahmachārīs, Gṛhasthas,

Vānaprasthas, and Sanyāsīs.

Atri—a celebrated sage and one of the sons of Lord Brahmā born from his mind. He compiled many Vedic literatures, one of them is Atri-smṛti.

B

Bābājī—a spiritualist in the renounced order of life who engages only in chanting the holy names of the Lord and executing devotional service for self-purification.

Bhāgavata—(1) an address to a pure devotee: (2) the transcendental narration of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the book named Śrīmad Bhāgavatam.

Bhagiratha—the great-grandson of King Sagara of the Solar Dynasty. He brought the Ganges to earth to purify his 60,000 ancestors.

Bhāṣya—an authorized commentary written in the unbroken chain of disciplic succession.

Bhīṣma-pāñchaka—the last five days of the Kārtika month which starts on the Ekādaśī day.

Bhṛgu—one of the ten patriarchs created by the first Manu. When the sages could not understand who was actually the Supreme among Lord Brahmā, Lord Viṣṇu, and Lord Śiva, they together chose Bhṛgu Muni to examine them and determine the real truth.

Bilva—A tree that has three leaves in one stem, and whose leaves are offered to Lord Śiva. Its fruits are medicinal and used for stomach problems.

Bimba—a reddish fruit.

C

Chaitya-guru—the Spiritual Master seated in the heart as the Supersoul who guides the living entity to surrender to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Charanāmṛta—sacred water that has washed the transcendental body or the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord or His pure devotee.

Chāturmāsya—the four months of the rainy season, when spiritualists remain in one place and perform extra austerities.

D

Dāhl—dried (split) beans that are generally cooked as soup along with spices and tomatoes to produce a protein-rich soup.

Dāmodara—a name of the Supreme Lord meaning “bound around the belly with a rope” by Mother Yasodā. (*dāma* means rope: *udara* means belly.)

Dāṇḍavat—offering respectful obeisances by prostrating eight parts of the body, namely the thighs, feet, hands, chest, thoughts, head, voice, and closed eyes.

Darśana—seeing the Supreme Lord or His pure devotee with devotion.

Daśamī—the tenth day of the waxing or waning moons: the day just before Ekādaśī.

Devaśayani—an Ekādaśī that falls during Chāturmāsya, in which Lord Viṣṇu and the demigods go to sleep.

Devatā—demigod. “*De*” means “to give,” and “*vatā*” means “to benedict,” meaning only after offering a sacrifice to the demigods will they reward one a material benediction within their capacity.

Devī—an honorable or celestial demigoddess. Sometimes used for a female devotee.

Dhanvantari—the physician incarnation of the Lord.

Dharma-patnī—a chaste wife married according to Vedic rituals.

Dharmarāja—another name of Yamarāja, the god of death, who takes charge of the pious souls.

Digdarśini-tikā—a commentary written by Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī on the request of Gopālabhaṭṭa Goswāmī to expand his compiled *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*.

Dikṣā—a process of initiation rewarded by a bona-fide Spiritual Master to remove the disciple’s ignorance and showing the path of liberation. In this the Guru is authorized by ancient Vedic scriptures.

Durgā—the superintendent of the material world who is the

wife of Lord Śiva.

Durvāsā—the son of the sage Atri and Anusūya. He is a great mystic and is very easily angered.

E

Ekādaśī—A day of Lord Hari that usually falls on the eleventh day of the waxing and waning moon of a month. On this day devotees fast completely. But those who cannot eat only fruits, milk products, sugar, potatoes, sweet potatoes mixed with rock salt and black pepper powder. Eating any kind of grains or beans or other vegetables is not allowed on this day. Those who desire to obtain blessings from God to reach the spiritual world must strictly follow Ekādaśī fast and other fasts like fasting on the Lord's appearance days. Starting from the age of eight till the age of eighty every human being must follow these fasts. The calendar of fasting days are published on our website www.krsna.org or can be requested by mail from the addresses listed in the front of this book.

G

Gauḍiyā—a Vaiṣṇava who follows the tradition and teachings of Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu.

Gāyatrī—the secret Vedic hymns given by a scripturally authentic Spiritual Master which are chanted silently to please the Supreme Lord. They are originally given by the Supreme Lord to Lord Brahmā when He initiated him and later handed them down in disciplic succession.

Ghee—clarified butter, used for cooking and fire sacrifices.

Gopīchandana—a sacred clay used by the Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇavas, obtained from a lake in Dvārakā where all the gopis dipped and ended their pastime on earth.

Gotra—the origin of one's dynasty, or an unbroken birth lineage directly connecting one to the creator.

Grantha—sacred book of Vedic scripture, meant to obtain self-realization.

Grhamedhī—an independent-minded householder who wants material enjoyment and who may be somewhat spiritually

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inclined.

Grastha—a spiritually inclined householder whose goal is to please the Supreme Lord in cooperation with Vaiṣṇava authority.

Gur—a healthy, lump of natural raw sugar, obtained by boiling down sugar-cane juice.

H

Hanumān—an incarnation of the eleventh Rudra (Lord Śiva). He appeared having a monkey face. He served the Supreme Lord Śri Rāma in many ways.

J

Jagad-guru—a bona-fide Spiritual Master who has conquered the six pushing agents, (speech, tongue, personal anger, mind, stomach, and the genital) and makes disciples all over the world.

Japa-mālā—a string of 108 beads made from sacred wood obtained from Tulasi plant, and used for chanting the holy names of the Lord.

K

Kamandalu—the waterpot carried by a saintly person.

Karma—actions that bind the doer with their reactions.

Kārtika-vrata—a vow of specific austerity taken during the month of Kārtika to purify oneself.

Kaustubha—a gem that hangs on the necklace of the Supreme Lord.

Kulārṇava-rahasya—an authorized scripture written by Śrīla Vyāsadeva as a conversation between Lord Śiva and his wife Pārvatī.

L

Lakṣmīdevī—the Goddess of Fortune and wife of Lord Nārāyaṇa.

M

Mādhūrya-bhāva—the worship of the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the mood of conjugal love.

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Mārkaṇḍeya—a sage who desired to see the universal devastation, and who saw the Supreme Lord lying on a banyan leaf.

Muhūrta—a period of auspicious time calculated as per astrology which lasts for forty-eight minutes.

Muktapuṣpa—a very fragrant white flower that usually blossoms in the summer; it is known in Vrindaban as *morigrā*.

Muktidevī—liberation personified, who rewards liberation to purified devotees.

N

Naivedya—food meant for offering to the Lord.

Naraka—hell.

P

Palāṇḍu—the onion, a vegetable rejected by Vaiṣṇavas.

Palāśa—a large leaf used to make plates for eating, which grows mostly in central and eastern India.

Pañchama-puruṣārtha—the ultimate goal of life—devotional service. This is the culmination of the four statuses of life—religiosity, economic development, sense gratification, and liberation.

Pāṇḍavas—the five sons of King Pāṇḍu, and the pure devotee friends of Kṛṣṇa.

Pandita—a learned Vedic Brāhmaṇa.

Pāṇini—a learned scholar who heard fourteen beats of Lord Śiva's dabble drum and then compiled the grammatical codes of Sanskrit.

Paramparā—an unbroken chain of disciplic succession originating from the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Parivrājakāchārya—a mature, renounced person who travels everywhere to spread the gospel of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Parīkṣit—the son of Abhimanyu and grandson of Arjuna who heard the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam from Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī.

Pāśāṅkuśā—an Ekādaśī that falls in September-October. Also known as Pāpāṅkuśā.

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Piśācha—hobgoblins, whose only function is to cause trouble for others.

Prabodhīnī—the Ekādaśī when Lord Viṣṇu and all the demigods wake up from sleep.

Prachāra—preaching the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Prasādam—food that has become sanctified by offering in sacrifice to the Lord.

Pratimā—the Deity form. The Deity can be made from any of five materials—earth, metal, jewels, wood, or paint.

Prāyaśchitta—atonement undertaken to rectify offenses or mistakes.

Pūjā—active worship of the Supreme Personality of Godhead in His Deity form.

Purāṇas—the historical scriptures directly written by Vyāsadeva, the literary incarnation of Godhead.

R

Rādhākuṇḍa—the most sacred lake of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, discovered by Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu over five hundred years ago.

Rathayātrā—the chariot festival of Lord Jagannātha, held once a year in the month of Vāmana (Āśādha; June-July).

Raurava—the most ferocious part of hell and the destination of the most sinful people. There are twenty-one varieties of Raurava hells.

Rāvana—the ten-headed demon who stole Śitādevī, the consort of Lord Rama, and was later killed by Him.

Rṣī—a supremely qualified sage whose only interest is in going back to Godhead and helping others to reach there also.

Rudra—one of the eleven expansion of Lord Śiva. *Rudrāṇīm Śarikaraś cāsmi* (Bhagavad Gtā10.23)

S

Sadguru—the true Spiritual Master who is authorized by the ancient Vedic scriptures to function as Spiritual Master to initiate a spiritually inclined candidate to become eligible to go back to Godhead.

Sādhanā—practical process of devotional service executed on a daily basis, details are mentioned in ancient Vedic scriptures like the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam.

Sādhu—a qualified saintly person whose senses are under his control and always remains engaged in performing spiritual activities.

Sāligrāma—a sacred representation of Lord Nārāyaṇa that looks like a round stone in this world. Padma Purāṇa gives a vivid explanation of Sāligrāma Śilā.

Samsāra—the wheel of repeated birth, disease, old age, and death.

Saṁskāra—a purificatory ceremony, which if observed properly purifies the Brāhmaṇa boy, thus making him become eligible to study the Vedas. Inherent quality or natural inclination of a person are also called Saṁskāra in Sanskrit.

Saṅkarāchārya—an incarnation of Lord Śiva who appeared to introduce Māyāvādī philosophy and drove away Buddhism from India. He appeared as a Brāhmaṇa Sanyāsī.

Saṅkīrtana—congregational chanting of the holy names of the Lord, especially the Māhāmantra of Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare / Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

Sanyāsī—a person in the renounced order of life, whose duty is to give spiritual knowledge to others, to be materially detached and to use everything in the service of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Saṅskāras—sixteen kinds of purification ceremonies, beginning with garbhādhāna-saṅskāra. Also see Saṁskāra.

Sarasvatī—the Goddess of Learning and wife of Lord Brahmā.

Sāri—the traditional Vedic dress for women, consisting of a single piece of cloth about five meters by one and a half meters in size with beautiful borders. Also called Saaree.

Satsaṅga—the association of saintly persons, or listening to narrations of the Supreme Lord from a saintly devotee which leads one to liberation.

Satyaloka—the topmost planet of this universe and the abode of Lord Brahmā.

Satyayuga—The golden age, the first age, which was free from

all kinds of vices.

Satyabhāmā—one of Lord Kṛṣṇa's two main queens in Dvārakā. Queen Rukmiṇī serves Lord Kṛṣṇa in the mood of opulence, and Queen Satyabhāmā serves Lord Kṛṣṇa in the mood of conjugal affection. One time, Rukmiṇī challenged Satyabhāmā to determine who could have full possession of Lord Kṛṣṇa. On a large balancing scale, Lord Kṛṣṇa sat on one side, and Rukmiṇī, who is directly the Goddess of Fortune, placed all of her opulence (gold, jewels, etc.) on the other side. Still she could not balance the scale. Rukmiṇī's opulence was then removed, and Satyabhāmā took a single Tulasi leaf, with "Rādhā" written on it with sandalwood paste, and placed it on the scale. That side of the scale immediately dropped to the floor. Thus proving that worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa in *mādhurya-rasa*, conjugal love, is the highest of all spirituality.

Śaunaka—he made inquiries from Sūta Gosvāmī on behalf of 88,000 sages in the Naimiśāraṇya Forest.

Śikhā—the tuft of hair left at the peak of a devotee's shaven head. A devotee desires Lord Kṛṣṇa to pull his *śikhā* and open the *brahma-randhra* opening on the top of the head at the time of death so his soul can depart through that opening and go back to Godhead.

Śloka—Sanskrit verses in Devanāgarī (the language of God and the demigods).

Smārta—ritualistic Vedic ceremonies for fulfilling one's material desires, or used to atone for one's sins, and for elevating one to heaven.

Śraddhā—firm faith and conviction in something sublime.

Śrāddhā—a ceremony for offering *prasādam* to one's departed forefathers.

Śrī—the prefix to the name of an honorable person who has extraordinary qualities.

Śrīdhara Swami—a commentator on the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, who was recognized by Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu.

Śrīla—Addressing a pure spiritual personality who is a Vaiṣṇava directly connected through spiritual process to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, His uncommon transcendental

knowledge, detachment, and austerity, makes others address him with the “Śrīla” title.

Śrīmān—a prefix to the name of an honorable Brāhmaṇa or a famous person.

Śrīmatī—same as Sriman, but for women.

Strī—a word indicating women, literally “one who expands.”

Sūdra—the laborer class of the four Vedic social orders or any person whose actions and thoughts are covered with ignorance.

Sūta Gosvāmī—the son of Romaharṣaṇa. He was the next speaker of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam after Śukadeva Gosvāmī.

Svarga—the heavenly planets or the upper planetary system.

Swami or Swāmī—a renounced person who has conquered his senses.

T

Tamāl—a tree found in India that is the color of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Taṇtras—hymns used by ritualistic followers and magicians.

Thākura—a title awarded to the topmost pure devotees.

Tikā—a commentary written by an authorized *ācārya*.

Tilaka—sacred clay from Dvārakā or Rādhā-kunḍa lake used to put marks drawn on one’s body while chanting the names of the Lord. They represent the building of temples there for the Lord to reside in.

Tripundra—three horizontal lines marked on one’s forehead with holy ashes or clay. These marks are used by followers of Saṅkarāchārya and also those who worship Lord Śiva.

Trisprīṣṭā—an Ekādaśī that occurs during *cāturmāsya* when Ekādaśī, Dvādaśī, and Trayodaśī appear on the same day. See Ekādaśī, The Day of Lord Hari by the author.

Triyugi—Lord Kṛṣṇa, who manifests open pastimes as the Personality of Godhead in Satyayuga, Tretayuga, and Dvāparayugas, but appears in Kaliyuga in His covered form as Lord Chaitanya, acting as a devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Tulasi—the most sacred and dear plant to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Her history is mentioned in the Padma Purāṇa, Uttarākhanḍa.

Tyāga—renunciation of material possessions and material sense gratification, and acting only for the satisfaction of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

U

Ūrjā-vrata—taking special vows of performing austerities according to one's ability during the Kārtika month.

V

Vaikunṭha—the spiritual world, where there is no anxiety of birth, disease, old age, and death.

Vālmīki—a great sage who took care of Sītā when she was exiled by Lord Rāma, and who wrote the Rāmāyāṇa on the orders of his Guru, Nārada Muni.

Vartma-pradarśaka—anyone who introduces one to the path of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Vaśiṣṭha—a Brāhmaṇa Spiritual Master of Lord Rāma who made Viśvāmitra take a vow to become a Brāhmaṇa.

Veda—to know the Absolute Truth in four sections called the books of knowledge—R̥gveda, Sāmaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda.

Vidura—an incarnation of Yamarāja appeared as a son of Vyāsadeva and acted as brother to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. He greatly assisted the Pāṇḍavas.

Vraja-dhāma—Vṛndāvana, the most sacred land in this universe, where Lord Kṛṣṇa performed His childhood pastimes. Anyone who touches a particle of its sand to his head achieves liberation. The total Vraja area is 168 orbit miles of which Vrindaban is the center point.

Vrajavāsi—a person born and raised in the Vraja area.

Vyāsadeva—the literary incarnation of Godhead and the son of Parāśara Muni and Satyavatī. He wrote all the Vedas and Vedic scriptures listed in the introduction to our Bhagavad Gita, The Song of God.

Y

Yājñīva-valkyā—an ancient sage and author of Yājñavalkya Saṁhitā, a Vedic law book that is almost as important as Manu Saṁhitā.

Yakṣa—a semi-demigod and follower of Kuvera, the celestial

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treasurer of the demigods.

Yamadhūtas—the messengers and the order carriers of Yamarāja, the Lord of death.

Yamaloka—the lower planetary system where Yamarāja resides, usually called the hellish planets.

Yamunā—a sacred river flowing in Vṛndāvana; eternally flowing in the spiritual world, she appeared in this world as the sister of Yamarāja and the daughter of the sungod to participate in Lord Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

Yavanas—Those who do not follow the Vedic scriptures, the barbarians.

Yoga—spiritual activities that link one with the Supreme Lord. Different from physical exercises.

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The critical study of Indian religious thought has established one absolute statement that can also be made about this book, *Vaiṣṇava Kanṭha-Hāra*. It is capable of deepening, and on occasion transforming, our moral sensibility. One thing this book certainly does is to bring one closer to some new intuition of man and the world he lives in. It restores the prestige of devotion over prosaic, logical argumentation—a prestige which unfortunately has been lost in our modern world of senseless endeavors and destinies.

Every man and woman needs to believe that the acts of meditation on, understanding of, and devotion to a supreme being are the only acts that give any sensible meaning to life. It answers the haunting question of modern man of what he can do to free himself from the chain which binds not only his sensuous body but also his restless soul to the suffocating, gravity-ridden, rusty rocks of materialism. It is here in this book all the questions, including what is human nature, what is the role of a human being, and what is the function of our existence, are answered. This book truly sheds light on troubled humanity. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarām Swāmī's *Vaiṣṇava Kanṭha-Hāra* belongs to this great tradition and must be welcomed with open arms.

Dr. Shaligram Shukla
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“ *Vaiṣṇava Kanṭha-Hāra* of Kṛṣṇa Balarām Swāmī is a faithful guide to vaisnava life and literature as revealed in the works of his spiritual master, Srila Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Keeping himself in the background, the author lucidly and ably presents the devotional philosophy and practice of Chitanya Vaisnavism. The work deserves attention both from scholars and devotees.”

K.L. Seshagiri Rao
Professor of Religious Studies
University of Virginia

Vaiṣṇava Kantha-Hāra, the Guidebook for the Spiritually Inclined, by His Holiness Kṛṣṇa Balarām Swāmī, presents an interesting and informative study of Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava spirituality in its many facets, upon which that of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is based. To a very large extent the work relies on original texts and the translations or other rare but authentic sources for this tradition.

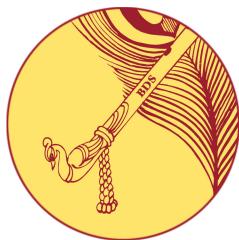
Although the book has a purpose to strengthen the spiritual discipline of devotees in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement it should also be of importance to all interested in Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism, one of India's important religions.

**Dr. Stillson Judah
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**Mahāmanḍaleshwar
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I do have the highest regards for His Holiness Kṛṣṇa Balarām Śwāmī's devotion, scholarship and deep spirituality. His book *Vaiṣṇava Kanṭha-Hāra* emerges from a lifetime of devotion and study within Vaiṣṇavism. I had the great good fortune of having His Divine grace Kṛṣṇa Balarām Śwāmī as a host in his extraordinary city of Vrindāban, India. Meeting with him in the sacred city of his birth was quite special, for it allowed me insight into the authenticity, depth, and praxis of his spiritual path. *Vaiṣṇava Kanṭha-Hāra*, like his other works, embodies those qualities and that commitment. Both practitioners and scholars will undoubtedly benefit from an encounter with the book.

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